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WONDER

STORY *Annual*

VOL. 1, NO. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

1951 EDITION

A FULL LENGTH NOVEL

TWICE IN TIME

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

A modern young man steps back into the wonder and magic of the Italian Renaissance—there to carve for himself a great career that will live on for centuries to come!

10

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Turnabout

A Short Short Story

By WILL GARTH



FIVE of the men in the great room sat quietly, staring apprehensively at the metal cylinder resting on the chromium table. The sixth man, old Harvey Harris, stood by the window, his eyes shut, thoughtful.

Lean, gray-haired Dr. Samuels broke the silence. "Gentlemen," he began, his tones crisp, "it has been two weeks since the disappearance of our colleague, Hugo Stone. Stone is the world's greatest expert on atomics and it is a certainty that without him we can never complete our machine for delving to the center of the Earth. And they're asking a million dollars in ransom for his release—ransom which we have but which we need to drive our Borer!"

As Dr. Samuels went on, discussing the kidnaping, Harvey Harris scowled somberly. Suppose it were he who had disappeared. Would his associates be as gravely concerned? He wondered, frowned. He was only a mathematician and could easily be replaced. He knew why he had been allowed to work with the combine. They were sorry for him. Five years ago a laboratory explosion had almost killed him. They had let him stay on, sympathetic. But rarely had they given him any work.

Harris shrugged his frail frame. Yes, if he had disappeared, the only one who would miss him would be his faithful assistant, Connors. Understanding Connors, who took all his dictation, even read aloud to him about the wonders of the heavens. For astronomy was Harris' hobby.

Samuels was still speaking. "This cylinder landed on Earth yesterday, its contents a strip of movie film which proves that the efforts of the Interplanetary Police are in vain . . . that Stone is captive on a space ship past Saturn. How the kidnapers were able to get out that far in two weeks, I don't know. Pursuit is hopeless for it would take our fastest ship about a month to reach that vicinity. It's bad news, just when we had a tip that Stone was being held captive on Earth's Moon!"

As Dr. Samuels motioned to an attendant, the lights dimmed and a movie projector snapped on, its image cast on the great white walls. First the men saw Earth receding in space. Then the familiar firmament.

From the sound-track came the kidnaper's voice, his tones disguised.

"We're nearing Saturn . . . You can see, by the relative position of Jupiter as seen from Titan, one of Saturn's moons, that we have your man somewhere around here." Then came a close-up of Stone, his features imploring.

"That's right," cried Samuels. "You can see several of Saturn's moons sweeping past to the right, like metal balls to a magnet. Rhea, Tethys, Hyperion, Phoebe—did you see them all scot by? Stone is out there all right and we'd better pay up!"

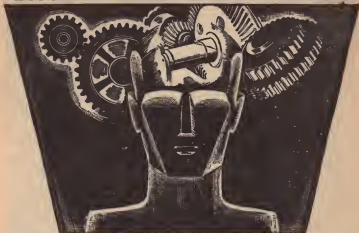
But Harvey Harris interrupted. "I wouldn't advise doing so, Samuels," he said quietly. "The Police are probably right and I wager they'll find Stone on our own Moon. Examine that movie film closely and you'll discover it's a clever fake, manufactured with miniature models. Those pictures were never taken in space!"

"What? Didn't we see the moons—"

"Yes," continued old Harris. "But the kidnapers made one mistake. You said you saw all the moons speeding in one direction past Titan. But any astronomer will tell you that nine of Saturn's moons revolve one way—normally. But the tenth—Phoebe—revolves in retrograde transit in the opposite direction from the others. Our kidnapers forgot that simple little fact!" Saying so Harris reached for the door. He smiled wistfully to himself. Old, was he? Useless? Thank God he knew his astronomy.

Dr. Samuels turned to the other members of his staff. "Ironic, men, isn't it," he said slowly, "that we who have eyes didn't see what Harris—blind since that explosion—realized in a moment. Maybe we've been blind for five years . . ."

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JOE NABBED THE CROOKS AND THEN...



OF SPACE AND TIME



THREE husky and very choice stories fill up the bulk of our annual anthology for 1951—and come close to blanketing the entire field of science fiction. One of them—our novel—**TWICE IN TIME** by Manly Wade Wellman, is as its title reveals, a tale of time-travel. Jack Williamson's short novel, **THE ALIEN INTELLIGENCE**, is a lost-world epic—while Eando Binder's novelet, **THE CHESSMEN OF MARS**, is a saga of space-travel.

Time travel—lost world—space travel—these are the very warp and woof of which science fiction is manufactured. And each is cut out of toploom fabric and woven cunningly and with great style. Mr. Wellman's novel, along with its fine science fiction offering, gives the reader a further bonus in the form of a vivid and learned picture of one of the most exciting eras in the human past—the Italian Renaissance.

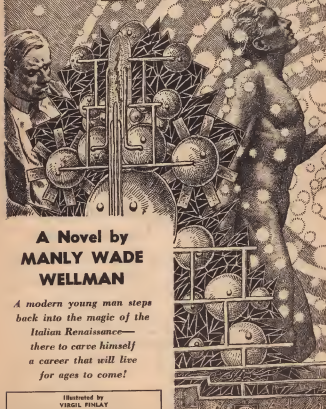
Mr. Williamson had his imagination turned on full blast when he composed **THE ALIEN INTELLIGENCE**—and the result is a high-tension story whose color and clarity of description and action make it horrifyingly real. And the Binders plotted their novelet with all of the shrewdness and talent that kept them for so many years up near the top of the science fiction totem pole.

Rather than run a miscellany of shorter stories of varying quality we have decided to publish these three longer stories unabridged, as they are just about the best in their particular fields of science fiction. **WONDER STORY ANNUAL**, we are glad to say, is ready to take its proper place, where quality is concerned, in line with its three older companions, **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**, **STARTLING STORIES** and **FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE**.

We wish you good reading in all of them.

—THE EDITOR

TWICE



**A Novel by
MANLY WADE
WELLMAN**

*A modern young man steps
back into the magic of the
Italian Renaissance—
there to carve himself
a career that will live
for ages to come!*

Illustrated by
VIRGIL FINLAY

IN TIME



FOREWORD

THE document herewith given publication was placed in the hands of the editors in 1939. Whether or not it explains satisfactorily the strange disappearance of Leo Thrasher near Florence, Italy, in the spring of 1938, we do not pretend to decide.

The manuscript came to America in the luggage of Father David Sutton, an American priest, at the time of the recent outbreak of war in Europe. Father Sutton was in Rome at the time and elected to remain, in

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The Challenge of Time Travel



TIME travel stories are probably as old as science fiction itself—which means they go back approximately to the ark. In their more primitive forms the protagonist or hero is usually sent into the future, there to foretell what lies ahead,

both for himself and the reader.

The desire to know whether war will or will not come next week, whether that nag will cop the sixth at Hialeah or what Amalgamated Zinc is going to do on the market is a human universal.

However, in its more sophisticated pattern the time-travel tale usually denies such acquisitive yearnings by moving into the far more intricate and exciting pattern of the past. Here a number of questions must be faced and answered which give pause to all but the ablest of story weavers.

For instance, if the past has happened, how can its pattern be changed without alteration of past and present alike? What occurs when a time-traveler encounters his younger self or his parents and ancestors? And, lastly, if any persons have traveled from the future into our historical past—why don't we know about it?

In one way or another—always credibly, always with that apparent easy fluidity which is the invariable sign of the fine professional—Mr. Wellman meets all the above challenges in what is, to us, just about the most stirring story of its type we have ever read—TWICE IN TIME! This is one story of time-travel that, instead of being limited by its gadgetry, achieves the full-bodied richness of the Renaissance itself.

—The Editor.

hope of helping war sufferers if his aid should be needed. But since Italy remained neutral, he sent back most of his luggage to America by a friend.

Later he sent an urgent letter, asking that this manuscript be examined and published if possible. It came, Father Sutton said, from the strongroom of an immemorial theological library in Florence and was in the original casket that had apparently contained it for a long period of time.

The priest's friend brought us both Father Sutton's letter and the casket with the manuscript. This casket is of tarnished silver, elaborately worked in the Renaissance manner. A plate on the lid bears this legend, in Italian, French and Latin:

Let no man open or dispose of this casket, on peril of his soul, before the year 1939.

Father Sutton's New York friends insist that if he actually wrote the letter and sent the casket they may be taken at face value. If it is a hoax perpetrated in his name it is both elaborate and senseless. In any case it is worth the study of those who love the curious.

Therefore, while neither affirming nor denying the truth of what appears, herewith is given in full the purported statement of the vanished Leo Thrasher.

CHAPTER I

TOMASULO'S INN

THIS story, as unvarnished as I can make it, must begin where my twentieth-century life ends in the sitting room of the suite taken by George Astley and myself at Toma-

aulo's inn, on a hill above the Arno. It is the clearest of all my clouded memories of that time. April was the month, still chilly for Tuscany, and we had a charcoal fire in the grate. I knelt among my dismantled machinery, before the charcoal fire, testing the connections here and there.

"So that's your time-traveler, Thrasher?" said Astley. "Like the one H. G. Wells wrote about?"

"Not in the least like the one H. G. Wells wrote about," I said spiritedly and not perhaps without a certain resentful pride. "He described a sort of century-hurdling mechanical horse. In its saddle you rode forward into the Judgment Day or back to the beginning. This thing of mine will work but as a reflector."

I PEERED into the great cylindrical housing that held my lens, a carefully polished crystal of alum more than two feet in diameter. I smiled with satisfaction.

"It won't carry me into time," I assured. "It'll throw me."

George leaned back in the easy chair that was too small for him. "I don't understand, Leo," he confessed. "Tell me about it."

"All right—if I must," I said. I had told him so often before. It was a bore to have to repeat what a man seemed incapable of understanding. "The operation is comparable to that of a burning-glass," I explained patiently, "which involves a point of light and transfers its powers through space to another position. Here"—I waved toward the mass of mechanism—"is a device that will involve an object and transfer or rather relate it to another epoch in time."

"I've tried to read Einstein at least enough to think of time as an



I fought against the power of
Guaracco's lustrous pearl
(CHAP. XIII)

extra dimension," ventured Astley. "But still I don't follow your reasoning. You can't exist in two places at once. That's impossible on the face of it. Yet from what I gather you can exist, you have existed, in two separate and distinct times. For instance, you're a grown man now but when you were a baby—"

"That's the fourth dimension of it," I broke in. "The baby Leo Tbrasher was, in a way, only the original tip of the fourth-dimensional me. At ten I was a cross-section. Now I'm another, six feet tall, eighteen inches wide, eight inches thick—and quite some more years deep." I began to tinker with my lights. "Do you see now?"

"A little." Astley had produced his oldest and most odorous pipe. "You mean that this present manifestation of you is a single corridor-like object, reaching in time from the place of your birth—Chicago, wasn't it?—to here in Florence."

"That's something of the truth," I granted, my head deep in the great box-like container that housed the electrical part of the machine. "I exist, therefore, only once in time. But suppose this me is taken completely out of twentieth century existence—dematerialized, recreated in another epoch. That makes twice in time, doesn't it?"

AS I had many times before, I thrilled to the possibility. It was my father's fault, all this labor and dream. I had wanted to study art, had wanted to be a painter, and he had wanted me to be an engineer. But he could not direct my imagination. At the schools he selected I found the wheels and belts and motors all singing to me a song both weird and compelling. The Machine Age was not enough of a barrier to me.

I demanded of it other wonders—miracles.

"I've read Dunne's theory of corridors in time," Astley was musing.

"And once I saw a play about them—by J. B. Priestly, wasn't it? What's your reaction to that stuff?"

"That's one of the things I hope to find out about," I told him. "Of course, I think that there's only the one corridor and I'm going to travel down it—or duck out at one point, I mean, and re-enter farther along. What I'd like to do would be to re-appear in Florence of another age, Florence of the Renaissance."

Astley nodded. He preferred the French Gothic period because of the swords and the ballads but he understood my enthusiasm for Renaissance Italy—to me, the age and home of the greatest painters, poets, philosophers of all times.

"Then what," he encouraged me, gaining interest.

"I'll paint a picture—a good one, I hope. A picture that will properly grace a chapel or church or gallery, a picture that will be kept for four centuries or more. Preferably it will be a mural that cannot be plundered or destroyed without tearing down a whole important building. When it's finished, I'll come back to this time, to this hour almost. Of course, I'll have to build myself a new time-reflector where I am, because it will be impossible to take this one with me."

"And we'll go together to the chapel or church or gallery and look at your work of art?" asked Astley. He lighted his pipe. "It will be your footprint in the sands of another time. Isn't that what you mean?"

"Exactly. Evidence that I've been twice in time." I sighed with a feeling of rapture, because for a moment I fancied the adventure already accomplished. "If I'm not able to do a picture," I told him, "I'll make my mark—initials or a cross. Cut it in the plinth of a statue, scratch it on the boards at the back of the Mona Lisa or other paintings that I know will survive. It will be almost as good a proof." I smiled. "However, I daresay

they'll let me paint. I have a gift that way."

"Perhaps because you're left-handed." Astley smiled at me through the blue smoke. "But one thing—in Renaissance Italy, won't your height and buttery hair be out of place?"

"Not among Fifteenth-Century Tuscans," I said confidently. "There were many with yellow hair and blue eyes. Look at the old Florentine portraits in any art gallery. Look at the streets of Florence today. Not all of those big tawny people are foreigners."

As I talked I was reassembling my machinery that we had brought with great care from my native America to this spot that I had long since chosen as the obvious place for my experiment. The apparatus took shape under my hands. The open framework, six feet high, as many feet long and a yard wide, was of metal rods, painstakingly milled to micrometric proportion in Germany.

At one end, on a succession of racks, was arranged my ray-generator, with its light bulbs, specially made with vanadium filaments in America. My camera-like device which concentrated the time-reflection power had been assembled from parts made by English, German and Swiss experts. And then there was the lens of alum with its housing, as big and heavy as a piece of water-main, which I now lifted carefully and clamped into place at the front of the camera.

Astley stared, and drew on his pipe. It was plain enough that he looked tolerantly on all my labor as well as my talk, and that he believed the whole experiment was something of which I would quickly tire. However, he had been complaisant enough about coming with me and lending what aid he could to my secret experiment.

"That business you're setting up there looks like the kind of thing

science fictionists write about," he said.

"It's exactly the kind of thing they write about," I assured him. "As a matter of fact, science fiction has given me plenty of inspiration and more than a little information while I've been making it. But this is practical and material, Astley, not imaginary."

He had not long to wait to witness the truth of that, though his phlegmatic nature could never have understood the tenseness that was making my nerves taut as a spring trap. I knew, however, that nerve strain was to be expected, for I was nearing the actuality of the experiment to which I had long given my heart and soul. I said nothing more because now, within the tick of seconds, I would *know* whether my dream could be reality or if, in fact, that all I had toiled and anguished for—was but a dream!

I AM not sure—how could I be certain?—whether my hands were steady when the great moment came. I know vaguely that my hands did reach out—

I pressed a switch. At the other end of the framework there sprang into view a paper-thin sheet of misty vapor, like a piece of fabric stretched between the rectangle of rods. I could be excused for the theatricality of my gesture.

"Behold the curtain!" I said. "When I concentrate my rays upon it, all is ready. I need only walk through." I stepped back. "Five minutes for it to warm up and I'm off into the past."

I began to take off my clothes, folding them carefully—the tweed suit, the necktie of wine-colored silk. "I can be reflected through time," I said with a touch of whimsicality, "but my new clothes must stay here." And more seriously, "I can't count on molecules to approximate them at the other end of the business."

"You can't count on molecules to approximate your body either," challenged Astley.

I knew that he was not as stolid as he was trying to appear, for his pipe had gone out and he was filling it and I could see that his hands shook a trifle. He was beginning to wonder whether to take me seriously or not. Unimaginative Astley!

"All my diggings into old records at the *Biblioteca Nazionale*, over in town, have been to find those needed molecules," I told him. "Look at those notes on the table beside you."

He turned in his big armchair—it was none too big for him at that—and picked up the jumble of papers that lay there. "You've written a date at the top of this one," he said as he shuffled them. "April thirtieth, Fourteen-seventy." And below it you've jotted down something I don't follow—'Mithraic ceremony—rain prayer—ox on altar.'"

"Which sums up everything," I said, pulling off my shoes. "Right here—right at this inn, which I hunted up for the purpose of my experiment—a group of cultists gathered on April thirtieth, Fourteen-seventy. Just four hundred and sixty-eight years ago today." I leaned over to look at the time gauge on my camera. "I'm set for that exactly."

"Cultists?" repeated Astley, whom I knew of old as apt to clamp mentally upon a single word that interests him. "What sort of cultists?"

"Contemporaries called them sorcerers and Satanists," I told him. "But probably they had some sort of hand-me-down paganism from old Roman days. Something like the worship of Mithras.* At any rate, they were sacrificing an ox on that day, trying to bring rain down on their vineyards.

"I have figured it out like this—if they needed rain, then that particular April thirtieth must have been bright and sunny, ideal for my reflection apparatus. They had an ox on the altar and from its substance I can reassemble my own tissues to house my personality again. The original molecules must, of course, have been dissipated somewhere along the route of the process in time. Is that all clear?"

Astley nodded slowly and I stood up without a stitch of clothing. A pier-glass gave me back a tall pink image, lank but well muscled, crowned with ruffled hair of tawny gold.

"Well, old man," I said with what nonchalance I could manage though every nerve in me was tingling, "the machinery's humming. Here I step into the past."

MY COMPANION clamped his pipe between his teeth but did not light it again. I could still see the disbelief in his eyes.

"I hope you know what you're about and won't do yourself much damage with that thing," he grumbled. "Putting yourself into such a position isn't like experimenting with rats or guinea pigs, you know."

"I haven't experimented with rats or guinea pigs," I informed him and stepped into the open framework.

I turned on another switch and through the lens of alum flowed an ice-blue light, full of tiny flakes that did not warm my naked skin.

"As a matter of fact," I said in what I was sure was a parting message, "I've never experimented with anything. Astley, old boy, you are about to see the first operation of my time reflector upon any living organism."

Astley leaned forward, concern at last springing out all over his face. "If anything happens," he protested quickly, "your family—"

"I have no family. All dead."

*Charles Godfrey Leland, in his important work, "Aradia; or the Gospel of the Witches of Italy," traces connections between witchcraft and the elder pagan faiths of Rome.



Flexing my bat-wings I sprang from
the eaves of the house
(CHAP. XII)

With lifted hand I forestalled what else he was going to say. "Goodbye, Astley. Tomorrow, at this time, have a fresh veal carcass or a fat pig brought here. That's for me to materialize myself back."

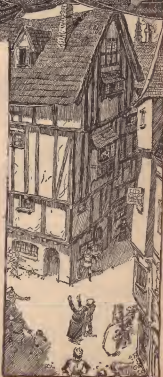
And I stepped two paces forward—into and through the misty veil.

At once I felt a helpless lightness, as though whisked off my feet by a great wave of the ocean. Glancing quickly behind me I momentarily saw the room and all in it, but somehow vague and transparent—the fading image of the walls, the windows, my openwork reflector-apparatus, Astley starting to his feet from the armchair. Then all vanished into white light.

THAT white light beat upon me with an intensity that was sickening. I tasted pungency, my fibers vibrated to a humming, bruising rhythm.

There was a moment of hot pain, deafening noise, a glare of blinding radiance.

Then peace, lassitude. Something seemed to materialize as a support under my feet. Again I saw the transparent ghost of a scene, this



time full of human figures. That too thickened, and I heard many voices, chattering excitedly. Then all was color, life, reality.

One voice dominated the others, speaking in resonant Italian. "*The miracle has come!*"

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST HALF HOUR

AT THOSE words, all fell silent and gazed at me in awe. It seemed unbelievable but all this was happening to me in the back yard of—yes, of Tomasulo's tavern. It was a changed back yard though, dominated by a simpler newer building.

I seemed to have trouble with my memory. It lagged as though I had been stunned. And the differences helped to confuse me. Here were no flagstones, no clutter of innkeeper's jetsam—only a level stretch of turf, hedged around with some tall close bushes of greenery. And my audience was grouped below rather than before me. I seemed to be standing high on a platform or pedestal of cut and mortared stone.

The altar of the ox-sacrificing cult! I had made the journey back through time from a Twentieth Century that just now hung dim and veiled in my mind, like something I had known in childhood instead of brief seconds ago.

"Kneel," intoned the same voice that had hailed me as a miracle.

At once the group before me dropped humbly down. There were a dozen or so of both sexes, most of them shabbily dressed. The men wore drab or faded blouses and smocks with patched hose on their legs. The women were untidily tricked out in full skirts, bodices and coifs or caps. Men and women alike wore long hair and several were as blond as myself.

I was quite evidently taken for some strange manifestation of the god or spirit they worshiped. Realizing this, I felt that I had an advantage. I sprang lightly down from the altar.

"Do not be afraid," I told them in my best Italian. "Rise up. Which is the chief among you?"

They came to their feet, in a shy group around me, and the tallest of them moved forward. "I am master of this coven," he murmured respectfully, fixing me with shrewd calculating eyes. "What is your will?"

"First, lend me that red cloak of yours."

He quickly unclasped it from about his throat. I draped it over my nakedness and felt more assured before this mixed audience.

"Now," I continued, "hark you all! Did you worship here because you sought a miraculous gift from heaven?"

"Not from heaven exactly," said the man who had given me his cloak.

He was the best clad of the entire group, wearing plum-colored hose and a black velvet surcoat that fell to his knees. His narrow waist—he was an inch taller than I and gaunt as a rake—was clasped by a leather belt with a round silver buckle.

His sharp face was decorated by a pointed beard of foxy red and above this jutted a fine-cut long nose. His eyes, so intent upon me, were large and deep, the wisest eyes I had ever seen. His broad brow, from which the hair receded as though beginning to wear away, was high and domed.

There was something about him to suggest Shakespeare — Shakespeare's face, that is, much more alert and enigmatic than generally pictured and set upon the body of Ichabod Crane. I describe him thus carefully because of the impression he made upon me then and because of the importance of the role he has since played in my life and career.

"Not from heaven," he said again. "Rather from our Father in the Lowest." He gestured downward with a big but graceful hand. "Why do you ask? Have you not been sent by him?"

This was a definite challenge and I made haste to simulate a grasp of the situation. With an effort I remembered the study I had made of this very incident, the prayer of a sorcerers' cult for rain on April 30, 1470.

"I am sent as your friend," I announced. "This ox, which you have offered—"

I gestured behind me toward the altar, then turned to look. The stones were bare save for a slight, dark moisture. I paused, thought quickly, and went on.

"This ox, which you have offered, has been transmuted into me, so that I may be your friend and guest."

There was more truth in that than my interrogator in the velvet surcoat thought, I told myself triumphantly. But I did not know him yet. I also congratulated myself that there had been an entire ox, for my time reflector seemed to have left little of it after the process of reassembling.

"As to the rain," I finished, "that will come, doubt it not." For I had seen, on the horizon beyond the lowest stretch of hedge, a lifting bank of cloud.

"Thank you, Oh messenger!" breathed an elderly cultist at my side. "Thank you, thank you!" came prayerfully from the others.

The lean spokesman bowed a little but I could discern the hint of a growing mockery in those deep brilliant eyes.

"Your visit is far more than we poor worshipers had the presumption to hope for," he said silkily. "Will you suffer these servants of the true belief to depart? And will you come with me to my poor dwelling yonder?"

I nodded permission and he spoke

briefly in dismissal of the others. They retired through a gap in the hedge, respectfully but without the awe a miracle might be thought to call forth. I was surprised, even a little piqued. Then the rationalization came to me.

This was the Fifteenth Century and the people were more naive, more credulous. They had come to this strange ceremony in expectation of a wonder. And when it came—even when there was more than they had hoped for, as my volunteer host suggested—it did not prostrate them with emotional amazement. I was strange but I was understandable.

WHEN the last had departed I faced the gaunt man. I have compared his body to that of Ichabod Crane but he was surer of his long limbs than the schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow. Indeed he seemed almost elegant with his feet planted wide apart and one big hand bracketed upon a bony hip.

"How are you called?" I asked him.

"My name is Guaracco," he said readily. "The master, I say, of the coven which has just done worship here. But if you are truly a messenger from him we delight to serve, why do you know not these things without my telling?"

A sneer was in his voice and I felt that I had best establish my defenses.

"*Ser* Guaracco," I addressed him bleakly, "you will do well to show courtesy to me. I did not come here to be doubted."

"Assuredly you did not," he agreed with a sort of triumphant good humor that yet made me uneasy. "And now, once more, will you come with me into my home?"

He made another of his graceful gestures, this time toward the back door of the stone house that I knew for Tomasulo's inn—at least for what would one day be Tomasulo's

inn. I nodded agreement and we walked together across the turf to the door.

That thought of mine—for what would one day be Tomasulo's inn. It behooved me to learn a new procession of thought, one that came two ways to the present. I must remember not only from the past but from that future, four centuries off.

I clarified the puzzle by calling to mind a fragment of conversation in *Through the Looking-Glass*. It read like this, I remembered: "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards." The White Queen had said that and, later, "Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." I had never before realized the deep scientific philosophy of that delightful story. Meanwhile it might help clear the fog that hung so persistently in some chambers of my mind.

My new acquaintance tapped softly on the door, which opened at once. Upon the threshold stood a tiny male creature in a dark gown-like garment. He was no larger than a child of nine and the bright face upturned to us might have seemed sweet if it had not reminded me of Guaracco's.

"Is this your son?" I asked my host.

He laughed quietly.

"Yes, Ambassador of the Powers Below. In some degree this is my son."

The little figure stood courteously aside and let us step into a dark narrow corridor. Guaracco's hand touched my arm through the folds of the borrowed cloak and I allowed myself to be guided down the passageway into a room beyond.

Here were dark decent hangings, a thick carpet, chairs, a settee and a table, on which lay some bulky and ancient-looking books. A single fat candle in a bronze sconce illuminated the room, for there was no window

—only a barred air-hole at the top. Guaracco invited me to sit down with a sweep of his hand toward the settee.

"I will offer you refreshment," he announced and clapped his hands.

From behind the hangings, evidently from a shadowed compartment beyond, darted a figure as small as the one that had admitted us to the house. But this one was hunched and misshapen with a pinched and aged-looking face set in the loose high collar of its gown.

In its long, knob-knuckled hands was held a tray with a silver flagon and two goblets of blue glass. This tray was set upon the table, then the small figure made a quick exit without looking back. I had been unable to judge sex or age in the brief moment of the small one's presence.

Guaracco carefully poured red wine from the flagon. "You do not ask," he commented smoothly, "if that was another of my sons."

I made no comment for I could think of none. Instead of growing clear my memory was becoming more scrambled and it worried me. There was also a definite taste of menace in the atmosphere. Guaracco lifted one of the goblets and held it toward me.

"He was as much my son as the other," he said. "Take this one, Ambassador. I daresay you will never drink another draught like it."

I took the goblet and he lifted the other.

"I give you a toast," he said, in a voice that suddenly rang with fierce mockery. "Sir, your immediate transportation to the floor of hell—the very place from which you ly-ingly claim to be sent!"

It was too much. I rose quickly and set down the goblet on the table. My left hand, with which I am quickest and handiest, doubled into a fist.

"Ser Guaracco," I said harshly, "I have had enough of your discourtesy. You doubt my being of an-

other world, even though you saw me appear from the very substance of the ox upon the altar, so—"

"Enough of that falsehood," he interrupted.

Quickly but delicately he set his

razor. They closed quickly in upon me, their eyes glittering cruelly.

Guaracco laughed calmly, the laugh of one who makes the final move in a winning game. "Before my familiars cut you into ounces,"



I constructed a really workable distillery in my prison cell (CHAP. XVII)

goblet down beside mine. Again he struck his palms together twice.

From the entrance to the passage darted the pretty little keeper of the doorway. From the opening behind the hangings sprang the withered-looking bringer of wine. Each held a long, thin blade, curved like a scimitar and plainly as keen as a

he said, "you had best make confession of your motives."

"Confession?" I echoed, amazed.

"Exactly. Oh, miracles have happened upon that altar before this—but it was I, Guaracco, who taxed my brain and my machine-shop to prepare them. Now you come without my knowledge or leave. I do not

allow rivals for my power, not even where it concerns those few foolish witch-worshippers. Out with your story, impostor—and at once!”

CHAPTER III

THE SERVICE OF GUARACCO

I CANNOT but be ashamed of the way I broke down. I might have faced out the surprise—I might have defied the danger. Together they overwhelmed me. Then and there, with Guaracco leering at me through his red beard, with the two dwarfs, who no longer seemed like little children, standing with swords ready to slash me to death, I told the truth, as briefly and simply as possible.

Guaracco heard me out, interrupting only to ask questions—most intelligent questions. When I had finished he nodded slowly and sagely.

“I know that you will refuse to believe—” I began but he interrupted.

“But I do believe,” he assured me in a tone surprisingly gentle. “I believe, lad, and in part I understand. My understanding will be made perfect as we discuss things more fully.”

He snapped his big fingers at the dwarfs. They lowered their swords and with a jerk of his head he dismissed them through their respective doors. Immediately there was less menace in the atmosphere. I felt relieved and thirsty. But when I put out my hand for the goblet Guaracco moved more quickly than I and spilled the wine out upon the carpet.

“That draught was poisoned,” he informed me. “I meant to destroy you, as a spy or rival. But fill again and we shall drink to our better understanding.”

I poured wine and we touched goblets and drank. His eyes above

the brim were as knowing as Satan’s own and for the first time I was sure of their color—deep violet-blue, almost as dark as ripe grapes.

“This is better,” I said and smiled—but Guaracco did not smile back.

“Do not think,” he returned in a level tone of warning, “that I cannot kill you later if such a course recommends itself to me. Those little entities you saw, frail though they appear, are half-parcels of fate. They can handle their blades like bravos, they can scale the tallest towers or wriggle between the closest bars to deal death at my will. The skulls of their victims, destroyed in my service, would pave all the streets of Florence, yonder. Nor”—and his voice grew colder still—“are they my only weapons.”

He stepped suddenly close, so that his proud lean nose was within an inch of mine. “In fact, your life could have been taken in two dozen ways between the yard and here, to say nothing of the poison and the steel I have seen fit to show you. Sit down, lad, and hear my plans for you.”

I sat down, with an unheroic show of acquiescence. He felt himself my master for his teeth flashed in a relished grin.

“Hark you, I seek power,” he told me. “Much power I have already. I wield it through the coven of deluded witches you have seen and others like them, through my spies and creatures in the guilds and companies and councils, through my influence on many individual persons, base and noble, here and elsewhere. But I want more power still. One day I shall not fear”—his narrow chest expanded a bit—“to give my orders to Lorenzo himself.”

“Lorenzo il Magnifico!” I murmured. “He rules in Florence of course.”

“Yes, he rules, prince in all but name—for the nonce. His time, I dare predict, will be short.” He strode across the room, hands be-

hind his velvet back, then turned and stood over me. "Hark you, man from the future. Your world, what you tell me of it, is not so strange nor so great as I would have expected. Yet you have many sciences and devices to show me. Machines, organization, foreknowledge of myriad kinds. For them I spare your life. You will be yet another of the chief agents in my service."

He told me that with flat assurance and I did not have the resolution to question his decision. All I could manage was something about my surprise that a sorcerer would be so interested in honest science.

"But sorcerers are scientists," he fairly snapped. "We offer our learning to the simple and they gape as at a miracle of demons. For effect's sake we mouth spells and flurry gestures but the miracle is science, sane and practical. If I am a sorcerer, so was Albertus Magnus. So was Roger Bacon, the English monk who gave us gunpowder. Well, if I escape the noose or the stake I may be as great as they. Greater."

AS HE spoke I pondered how history was showing him wise and truthful. Magic always foreran science. From alchemy's hokus-pokus had risen the boons of chemistry, physics and medicine. The quibblings of astrologers had made astronomy a great and exact field of scientific study. Also, could not psychoanalysis look back to the an-

cient Chaldean magicians who interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams?

But now I was dealing with things in the future from which I had stepped, things that *had happened* in that future. Again I attempted and almost achieved the feat of rationalizing the memory of things to come. If I could do it, I felt, the clouds would leave my mind.

"This traveling in time that you have accomplished is of deep interest to me," Guaracco continued, pacing back and forth. "I feel that we may attempt it again together. I would dearly love to see that world of which you speak, four centuries and more ahead of us. But these things are not more wonderful than others you mention. Tell me something about weapons of war."

Slowly and vaguely I ventured a description of the magazine rifle, then of the machinegun. My explanations were faulty and imperfect, yet he was deeply interested and brought forth tablets and a red-leaded pencil with which to make sketches.

He drew crudely and I took the pencil from him to improve his representations.

"By Mercurius, the god of thieves, you depict things well!" he praised me. "Your left hand is surer than my right. Perhaps you have studied the arts? Yes? I thought so." He squinted at me knowingly, tweaking the point of his foxy beard. "I

[Turn page]

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am inspired concerning you."

"How is that?" I asked.

"Tomorrow we go into the city of Florence," he decreed. "I shall introduce you there as a kinsman of mine, newly from the country, who seeks to enroll in the ancient and honorable guild of Florentine painters. I know a fitting teacher—Andrea del Verrocchio. I shall pay his fee to enter you in his *bottega* as a student."

"I am to serve you there?"

"Serve me there or through there in other places. Verrocchio is well known and well liked. Lorenzo and the other great nobles patronize him. I have not yet a proper agent among the arts. You will suit nicely in that position."

Again I agreed—because there was nothing else to do. He chuckled in triumph and actually patted my shoulder, saying that we would get along famously as adopted cousins. Then he led me to another room, in which were a bed and a cupboard.

"You will rest here tonight," he informed me. "Here"—he opened the cupboard—"may be some clothing that will furnish you. We are of a height, you and I, and not too dissimilar in girth."

But despite Guaracco's confidence in this last matter his hose stretched drum-tight upon my more muscular legs and his doublet proved too narrow in shoulder and hip.

"We shall have that altered," he decided and, going to the door, raised his voice. "*Lisa!*"

"My lord?" replied a soft, apprehensive voice from another room.

"Come here at once, child, and bring your sewing tackle." He turned back to me. "You shall now see my greatest treasure, *Ser—Leo*. I think you called yourself? That is the name of the lion and it matches well with that tawny mane of yours."

Into the doorway stepped a girl.

In her way, she was nearly as

impressive as Guaracco had been. Not tall, of a full but fine figure, as graceful as a dancer, she paused on the threshold as though timid at sight of a stranger. Her face was finely oval, with large soft eyes of midnight blue and a shy close-held little mouth that was so darkly red as to be purple. These spots of color glowed the more vividly because of the smooth ivory pallor of her skin.

Her hair was thick and sooty black, combed neatly straight under a coil as snug as a helmet. She wore a chemise of sober brown with a black bodice over it and a black woolen skirt so full and long as to hide her feet.

In her thin steady hands she held a flat iron box, the sewing kit Guaracco had commanded.

Have I described a beautiful woman? She was that and nobly modest as well. And so I call her impressive.

"Lisa, I present to you *Ser Leo*, a new servant of my will," said Guaracco to her. "He is to be of value to me, therefore be courteous to him. Begin by altering this doublet to his measure. Rip the seams here and here and sew them together again in a fuller manner."

He turned to address me. "*Ser Leo*, this girl Lisa is for you a model of obedience and single-hearted helpfulness." He raked her with his eyes, not contemptuously but with a dispassionate pride, as though she were a fine piece of furniture.

"I bought her, my friend, of her beggarly parents, eighteen years gone. She was no more than six months old. I have been father and mother and teacher to her. She has known no other lord than myself, no other motive than mine."

The girl bowed her head as if to hide her confusion at being thus lectured upon and busied herself with scissors and needle. I pulled Guaracco's red cloak around my naked shoulders. My self-appointed



Every defender bore mightily against the great log (CHAP. XVII)

master smiled a trifle.

"That flaming mantle becomes you well. Take it as a present from me. But to return to Lisa—I trust her as I trust few. She and the two jimps you have seen are the closest to me of my unorthodox household. She cooks for me, sews for me, keeps this house for me. I, in turn, shelter and instruct her.

"Some day, if it will profit me greatly, I may let her go to a new master—some great lord who will thank me for a handsome submissive present. She will cherish that great lord and learn his secrets for me. Is that not so, Lisa?"

She bowed her head the lower and the ivory of her cheeks showed pink, like the sky at the first touch of morning. I shared her embarrassment but Guaracco chuckled quietly and poured himself a half-goblet of wine.

This he drank slowly, without inviting me to join him.

In a surprisingly short time Lisa had finished broadening the doublet for me and it fitted my torso like wax. Guaracco was moved to another of his suave compliments on the appearance I made.

WITH evening drawing near the three of us took a meal. It was served in the hedge yard where Guaracco's dupes had prayed to infernal powers for rain. Whether by prayer or by coincidence, the rain did arrive not long after we had finished the bread, chicken and salad that Lisa set before us. As the first drops fell we went indoors and took wine and fresh peaches and honey by way of dessert in a great front room that was luxuriously furnished with gilded couches, tables and tapestries.

After the supper, Guaracco conducted me to his workshop, a great flag-floored cellar. Here was a bench, with lamps, retorts and labeled flasks for experimentation in chemistry and in this branch of science I was

to find my host—or captor—amazingly learned.

The greater part of the space, however, was filled with tools and odds and ends of machinery, both of wood and metal.

At Guaracco's command, I busied myself among these. But my strange memory-fault—I was beginning to think of it as partial amnesia—came to muddle me again. I could make only the most slovenly demonstrations and when I sought to explain I found myself failing wretchedly.

"You cannot be blamed for these vaguenesses," Guaracco said, almost comfortingly. "A drop backward through time, four hundred years and more, must of necessity shock one's sensibility. The most delicate tissues are naturally in the brain."

"I hope to recover my faculties later," I apologized. "Just now I progress in generalities only."

"Even so, you are better grounded in these things than any man of this present age," he encouraged me. "Your talk of that astounding power, electricity, amazed me. Perhaps things can be harnessed with it. Steam, too. I think I can see in my mind's eye how it can be put to work, like wind in a sail or water flowing over a mill-wheel." His eyes brightened suddenly. "Wait, *Ser Leo*. I have an inspiration."

"Inspiration?" I echoed.

I watched while he opened a small casket on the bench and fetched out a little purselike bag of dark velvet. From this tumbled a great rosy pearl the size of a hazelnut and glowing as with its own light. Upon his palm he caught it and thrust it under my nose.

"*Look!*" he commanded and I looked.

To be sure, it must be a valuable jewel to be as full of rose-and-silver radiance as a sunset sky. It captivated my soul with the sudden impact of its beauty.

"*Look,*" repeated Guaracco and I gazed as though my eyes were bound

in their focus. The pearl grew bigger, brighter.

"Look," he said, yet again as from a distance and, though I suspected at last his motive, I could not take my eyes away.

The light faded, consciousness dropped slackly from me like a garment. I knew a black silence, as of deep sleep, then a return to blurred awareness. I shook myself and yawned.

A chuckle sounded near by, and I opened my drowsy eyes to find Guaracco's foxy face close to mine.

"You are awake now?" he asked, with a false gentleness.

"How long did I sleep?" I asked but he did not reply.

He polished the pearl upon his sleeve and slid it carefully into its velvet bag.

"I think that some, if not all, of the forgotten things are buried in your mind," he observed. "With you I tried a certain way that fools call black magic."

Hypnotism, that was it, Guaracco had hypnotized me. Had he, in reality, found in my subconscious mind those technical matters that I seemed to have almost forgotten?

"Every minute of your company," he was continuing, "convinces me that I did well to spare your life and enlist you in my service. Now draw for me again."

I obeyed and he watched. Once again he praised me and swore that I should be placed as a student with Andrea del Verrocchio. It had grown late by now and he escorted me to my bedchamber, bidding me good-night in most cordial terms.

But when the door closed behind him I heard the key turn in the heavy bronze lock.

CHAPTER IV

APPRENTICESHIP

ON THE following day fell the torrents of rain that had been prayed for in such occult fashion and the trip to Florence was postponed. To my chagrin my memories of various details that had been so clear during my twentieth century existence were even cloudier, so much more so that I spent the morning making notes of what little I remembered.

These notes Guaracco appropriated with as cordial a speech of thanks as though I had done them expressly for him. I might have protested but near at hand loitered the uglier of his two dwarfs—and there might have been even a greater danger at the window behind me or hidden among the tapestry folds at my elbow.

So I gave over writing and went to talk to Lisa, the sober but lovely young girl to whom he had introduced me the night before. I found her still shyly friendly, possessed of unflinching good manners and charm. She had needlework to do and I sat talking and listening, fascinated by the play of her deft white fingers. While we were together I, at least, felt less the sense of being a prisoner and an underling.

But the rain had ceased by sunset and early the next morning Guaracco knocked at my door to call out that we would go to Florence immediately after breakfast. We ate quickly and went out into the fine early sunlight. Servants—Guaracco had several in a nearby cottage, peculiar fellows but deeply devoted to him—brought around horses, a fine white stallion for Guaracco and an ordinary bay for me. I mounted, being glad that I had not forgotten how to ride, and we cantered off along a clay-hard-

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ened highway with a groom on a patient mule behind us.

We had not far to ride to Florence. I found the valley of the Arno much the same as I had known it in my former existence, green and bounded by hills, sprinkled with villas, clusters of peasant huts and suburbs, with the town in the middle.

FLORENCE itself was smaller, newer, more beautiful. The town lay secure amid high battlemented walls of stone, with the river running through. I saw the swell of the Duomo, second cathedral of all Christendom, great and round and pale, like the Moon descended to Earth—and around it, the towers of many white houses and palaces, the cool green of garden trees.

The gate we entered was perhaps twenty-five feet wide by fifteen high and the tall lintel of gray-brown stone bore a bas-relief of St. Mark's lion, complete with wings and book. Also several female figures which appeared to have tails.

Within the walls the town I had known as grubbly ancient in the twentieth century shone all new and fresh. By the clean whiteness of the houses and by their style of architecture I judged that all or nearly all of the older Florence had been razed to allow this new Renaissance capital of the Medici its full glory.

The streets were for the most part smoothly paved or at least had good gutters and cobbles. Some of them, the side ways, were too narrow even for one-way traffic, were darkly close with the upper stories of the houses projecting. In many places these upper stories jutted out so far as to make a covered way for pedestrians at either side. Here and there stood the enclosed mansions and gardens of nobles or wealthy merchants and at many crossings were wide squares, adorned occasionally with the statue of a saint or hero.

Many folk were afoot or on horseback though there were few wains

and these of the most primitive. Most of the transport was done by donkey pannier or in baskets on the brawny shoulders of porters. The people seemed prosperous and in most cases happy. Later I was to be reminded that the Florentines then enjoyed a unique freedom and were wont to boast about it to less-favored Milanese or Venetians.

At last, at Guaracco's signal, we reined our animals before a tall barnlike structure of drab stone, fronting away from the brink of the green Arno. It was several stories high, pierced with many barred windows and furnished with a double door of iron grillwork.

"This is Verrocchio's *bottega*," said my guide and we dismounted, leaving our bridle-ends in the hands of the silent groom.

I moved toward the door but Guaracco's big hand touched my elbow. I turned inquiringly.

"Before you enter here, I have a thought to burn into you," he said in a cold, hushed voice.

With his deep, penetrating eyes, his red beard and suddenly sinister face, he might have sat for a traditional portrait of Judas. I knew, more fiercely than ever, a dislike and distrust of him.

"You wish to exact a vow of fealty from me?" I suggested. "Vows begin, Ser Guaracco, only when hope is dead."

He shook his head and under his beard his mouth wriggled like a snake in singed grass. "No," he replied. "I exact no vow. I say simply that if you betray me in word or deed, if you seek ever to hurt or to hinder me—if, in short, you do not adhere to the services I have set you then will I see that you die by the foulest death ever invented."

"I am not afraid of you," I said to him, striving in my heart to make this the truth.

"Nor do I seek your fear," was his quick rejoinder. "Only your understanding. Shall we go in?"

THE great front room of the academy was as large as a riding hall, with high musty beams on the ceiling and whitewashed walls, not as light as one might wish to paint by but with the windows all set toward clear open ground. The corners of the room were cluttered with art materials, plaster molds, half-finished paintings on planks, broken chairs, pots of paint, sheafs of brushes, rolled parchments and canvases.

Three or four young men in shabby smocks stopped their various tasks to gaze curiously at me—students, I supposed them to be. And from behind a counterlike bench at the door a man greeted Guaracco.

"Good morrow, Ser Andrea," said my patron. "I said once that I would

watch out for a likely pupil for you. Here is one—my own Cousin Leo."

The master of the *bottega* came from behind his bench. He was a spidery little fellow of forty or thereabouts, clad in a long gown of dark wool like a priest's, with ill-fitting worn slippers on his flat feet. His face was beardless, white and puffy and he wore spectacles low upon his snub nose. His hair, already gray, had begun to grow thin on top. His finest features were his big, wise eyes and his slender delicate hands.*

Guaracco praised me highly and finally produced my drawings. Andrea Verrocchio carried them into the light and looked at them narrowly with pursed lips. Finally he turned his spectacles upon me.

"You draw well, boy," he commented. "Drawing is the father of all the arts. Would you learn to paint?"

* This is the accepted description of Andrea del Verrocchio, who was not only a painter and sculptor high in favor at court, but the teacher of some of the most distinguished artists and craftsmen of his time.

(Turn Page)

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I told him quite truthfully that it was my ambition.

"If you study with me," he admonished, "you must work entirely as I devise."

"To devise is the work of the master," I said, respectfully. "To execute is the work of the apprentice."

"Well worded." He nodded, and smiled a trifle. "Come here—look at this picture."

He beckoned us across the room. Against the rear wall hung a sizeable sheet of wood, held in place on a sort of scaffold with cords and pins. Upon this had been painted but not finished an oil of the baptism of Jesus. Some of the figures were executed with spirit and intelligence but over one of them, a kneeling angel, I could not but shake my head.

"You see the fault," murmured Andrea Verrocchio beside me. "The draperies, *Ser Leo*, are not properly done."

"They are not, sir," I agreed after a careful examination.

He smiled slowly. The students too had gathered with us. I had a sense of their critical suspicion. Perhaps they had worked at the thing and failed.

"Peradventure, boy, you can better it," suggested Verrocchio in a tone that was full of superior doubt.

"May I use these paints?" I inquired, stooping to some pots and brushes at the foot of the framework.

As I did so I caught a glimpse of Guaraccio's face, set in an easy smile. For all his strange menacing nature he at least trusted my skill.

"Drapery is a science worth close study," I lectured the group as I mixed some colors upon a rectangular palette board. "The part of the fold which is furthest from the ends where it is confined"—I pointed with my brush at the fringe of the angel's robe—"will return most closely to its original extended condition."

One student snickered at my words. "Show us what you mean by these words," Verrocchio said.

"With your leave I shall try." I accepted his challenge and began to dash on my paint. Here was another old skill I had not lost. "Everything naturally desires to remain in its own state," I elaborated. "Drapery desires to lie flat. If it is caught into folds or pleats thus"—and I executed a crumpled crease upon the knee of the angel—"it is forced to quit this condition of flatness and obeys the law of this force in that part where it is most constrained."

I progressed to the hem.

"The part furthest away from such constraint," I went on, "you will find returns most nearly to its original state—that is to say, lying extended and full."

"You say truth, *Ser Leo*, and you paint truth too," Verrocchio commended me warmly and turned quickly to Guaraccio. "Your kinsman stays here as my pupil and helper. Go forward with that drapery, young sir. When you are finished, the picture can have no further improvement."*

I WORKED away, caring little for the jealous staring of my fellow students. Meanwhile, Guaraccio's groom brought in a bundle of clothing for me and Guaraccio himself gave me a bag of clinking coins.

"I have paid the charge for your education, Cousin," he said to me. "Stay here, live and work here, and do me credit. Do not forget what I require from you according to our recent conversations. I shall keep an eye and ear upon you. I may even take a house to be near you. Again I say—do not forget."

And with this equivocal farewell he strolled out, the very picture of a kindly and helpful kinsman.

* A painting that fits this description, and that might be the same, exists today in Florence. It is certain that the draperies of the kneeling angel are done more skillfully than those of the other figures.

So I became a pupil of Andrea del Verrocchio, the finest teacher of arts in Florence. I made the acquaintance of my fellow students and found them not at all bad fellows, some indeed quite adept at their work. I had a cell-like room with pallet bed and table and chest of art materials. I listened dutifully to the precepts of our instructor and under his tutelage did many kinds of work.

Verrocchio's aptitude and taste were for sculpture and though I thought this less intellectual than painting, for it cannot represent transparent or yielding things, I did not rebel.

My first piece of finished work, a gold ornament for the King of Portugal, was called splendid by Verrocchio. He let me help him with the great bronze busts he was fashioning for the palace of the Medici, later let me execute alone a series of ornamental shields of painted wood for a wealthy merchant.

In the evenings and sometimes in the daytime when work was slack, I was permitted to go with my fellow students through the streets. I could never weary myself with the sights and sounds and smells of Florence.

I loved the pageantry of the main thoroughfares—laden beasts, processions of armed men going from one sentry post to another, occasional rich coaches of the great or wealthy, cavaliers on prancing horses, veiled ladies in mule-litters. Rougher but still picturesque guildsmen, artisans, beggars, burghers. An occasional captain of mercenaries, a *condottiero*, slashed and swaggering, his long sword sheath hoisting up the hem of his mantle. Criers loudly acclaiming their wares of fruit, fish, wine or whatnot.

On the poorer narrower streets there were hucksters and small tradesmen with baskets and trays—and bevy of bright-eyed girls on the lookout for romantic adventure. There were palaces to see in the wider spaces and the great sculp-

tured bridges across the Arno. Too there were pleasant cheap taverns, where young men might get good wine and plenty for copper coins.

So it went for the month of May. Twice during that time Guaracco called to talk to me in honeyed protestations of concern over the welfare of his supposed cousin. But between the pleasant lines of his conversation my inner ear could distinguish the warning and insistence of his power over me.

Once he remarked that Lisa—"You remember our little Lisa!"—had sent me her warm regards. I found myself heartily grateful for that brief message from one who had treated me fairly and kindly.

The first of June dawned bright and sultry hot. I was up betimes, putting the last touches to an improvement on the scaffolding which served Verrocchio as an easel for extra-large pictures. I fitted its cords to pulleys and winches so that the artist, instead of moving from one place to another, could hold a certain position with advantageous lights and viewpoints while he lowered the picture itself or lifted it or moved it from side to side at his will.

In the midst of my work a boy came in from the street. He approached and said very softly that he had a message.

"A message?" I demanded, turning. "For whom?"

The little fellow bowed. "For you, Ser Leo. I am ordered to conduct you to a place in the next street."

"How do you know my name?" I asked, and looked sharply at him. Then I saw that it was no boy but the dwarf who had once opened Guaracco's door to me and whom I had then mistaken for a handsome child.

"Come," he persisted. "You are awaited."

Turning from my work I asked Verrocchio if I might be excused for a few moments. He glanced up from the bench where he and two other students were studying the plans of

a chapel and nodded his permission. "Is it Guaracco who waits to see me?" I asked the dwarf as we emerged from the *bottega* into the sticky sunlight—but he smiled mysteriously and shook his little head.

WE WALKED along the street, my guide trotting in front, and turned a corner. There at the brink of the river was a small dwelling house surrounded by a green garden. "Go in, *Ser Leo*," the dwarf bade me and ran around to the back with the nimble suddenness of a dog.

Left alone, I knocked at the door. There was no answer and I pushed down the latch and went in.

I found myself in a cool, dark hall, paneled in wood. On a leather-cushioned sofa sat Lisa, the ward of Guaracco. Her feet were pressed close together under the hem of her wide skirt and her hands were clasped in her lap. About her whole attitude there was an air of tense embarrassed expectancy. She looked up as I came in, then quickly dropped her gaze, making no answer to my surprised greeting.

As I came farther into the room, approaching the girl, a pale oblong caught my eye—a folded paper, lying on a little round center table. Upon it were written three large letters: LEO

"Is this for me?" I asked Lisa, who only bowed her head the lower. I began to catch something of her embarrassment. "Your pardon for a moment," I requested and opened the paper. The letter was brief and to the point. It read:

My dear adopted Kinsman,

You have thus far pleased me much and I have high hopes of great advantage from your acquaintance and endeavor. It occurs to me to make you a present.

In the short time you were my guest, you saw my ward, Lisa. She likes you and you are not averse to her society. Take her, therefore, and

I wish you joy of each other.

From

Guaracco

CHAPTER V

THE GIFT OF GUARACCO

THE first sentence of the letter astonished me beyond measure. The last had two effects, overwhelming and sudden in succession, like the reports of a double-barreled gun.

For my primary impulse was to rejoice, to be glad and thankful. Why had I never realized that I loved Lisa? Thinking of her now, how could I help but love her? But my second reaction was one of horrified knowledge of what Guaracco meant by such a gift.

"Lisa, fair mistress," I said, "this letter—you know what it says?"

She nodded, and the living rose touched her ivory skin.

"It cannot be," I told her soberly.

"Cannot?" she repeated, no louder than a sigh. It might have been a protest, it might have been an agreement.

I overcame an impulse to fall on one knee before her like any melodramatic courtier of that unrestrained age and land.

"Lisa," I said again, desperately choosing my words, "first of all let me say that I am deeply moved by the mere thought of winning you. Guaracco appears to mean what he says and you appear ready to consent." Watching her I saw the trembling of her lips. "But I cannot take you at his hands, Lisa."

At last she looked me full in the face. She too began to comprehend.

"That subtle wizard, Guaracco," I went on, growing warm to the outrage he would wreak, "tries to rule us both by fear. He sees that he is not successful. We yield slowly, bidding our time, for orders are orders

until there comes strength for disobedience. And so he seeks to rule us by happiness. Confess it, Lisa. For a moment you too would have wanted love between us!"

She gave me her sweet little smile with unparted lips, but shyness and restraint covered her again and she did not answer me.

"We cannot, Lisa," I said earnestly. "It might be sweet and for me at least it would be the easiest course in the world. But Guaracco's touch upon our love—heaven forefend that we be obligated to him!"

"Eloquently said, Leo, my kinsman!"

It was the voice of Guaracco. I spun quickly around, ready to strike out at him. But he was not there. Only his laughter, like the whinnying of a very cunning and wicked horse, was there, combing the empty air of the room.

"Do not strive against nothingness, young hero," his words admonished me out of nowhere, "and do not anguish me by spurning my poor tender ward. She loves you, Leo, and you have just shown that you love her."

Such words made it impossible for me to look at Lisa and therefore I looked the harder for Guaracco. In the midst of his mockery I located the direction of the sound. He spoke from the room's very center and I moved in that direction.

At once he fell silent but I had come to a pause beneath the point where the final syllable still echoed, almost in my ear. I glared around me, down and upward.

A cluster of lamps hung just above my head, held by several twisted cords to the ceiling. Among the cupped sconces I spied what I suspected—a little open cone of metal like a funnel. I am afraid that I swore aloud, even in Lisa's presence, when I saw and knew the fashion of Guaracco's ghostly speaking. But I also acted. With a single lunge and grasp I leapt to grasp the lamps and

pulled with all my strength.

They came away and fell crashing, but not they alone. For with them came a copper tube that had been suspended from cords and concealed there. I tore it from its place in the ceiling. Beyond that ceiling, I knew, another tube went to the lips of Guaracco, in hiding. I cast the double handful of lamps upon the planks of the floor.

Once again Guaracco laughed but this time from behind me in the room itself. Again I turned. A panel of the woodwork had swung outward and the man himself stepped through, all black velvet and flaming beard and sneering smile.

"You are a quick one," he remarked. "I have fooled many a wise old grandfather with that trick."

I gathered myself to spring.

"Nay, Leo," he warned me quickly. "Do nothing violent, nothing that you would not have set down as your last act on earth." His hand lifted and in it was leveled a pistol, massively but knowingly made. I stared for a moment, forgetting my rage and protest at his villainous match-making. Surely pistols were not invented so early.

"It is of my own manufacture," he informed me as though he read my mind. "Though short, it throws a ball as hard and as deep as the longest arquebus in Christendom. Do not force me to shoot you, kinsman." His lips writhed scornfully over the irony of our pretended relationship.

"Shoot if you will," I bade him. "I have said to Lisa and I also say to you that I shall not be led by love, into your deeper hateful service."

He shook his rufous head with a great show of melancholy. "Alas, young Cousin! You do great and undeserved wrong to Lisa and to me. Only this morning she was disposed to thank me for the thought, to scan by way of rehearsal the marriage service. Ah, I have it!" He laughed aloud.

"You do not think that a poor art student like yourself can support a wife and household." He held out his free hand, as warmly smiling as any indulgent father. "Take no further thought of it. I myself shall provide a suitable dowry for the bride."

EVEN poor wretched Lisa exclaimed in disgust at his evil humor and I started forward suddenly, coming so close to Guaracco that I found the hard muzzle of his pistol digging into the pit of my stomach.

"Back," he commanded, with quiet menace. "Back, I say, at once! That is better. What fantastic objection have you to raise this time?"

"You add money to beauty and love in the effort to buy me!" I cried thoroughly disgusted. "*Dowry!* A bribe to marriage! Oh, you are infamous! Surely we are living in the last days of the world!" I flung wide my arms, as though in invitation of a shot. "Kill me, Guaracco! You said once that you would kill me if I disobeyed you. Well, I disobey, and with my last breath I do name you a sorry scoundrel!"

He shook his head and moved back. "No," he demurred gently. "Perhaps, after all, the fault was mine. I was too abrupt for your dainty nature, Leo." He turned his eyes but not his head toward the unhappy Lisa, where she sat in mute and woeful confusion. "Forgive this ungallant fellow, my child. Perhaps another time—"

"There shall be no other time," I said flatly. "I refuse once and for all."

"Then go," Guaracco bade me and he simulated a bored yawn. "You have disappointed me and shamed Lisa. Return to your labors among the arts and when your heart is cooler we shall talk again. Go."

I went and my nature was more fiery hot than the waxing sun overhead.

Guaracco had spoken this much truth. I had brought shame to Lisa. Apparently she had been ready to accept me as a mate and whether this was at Guaracco's hypnotic suggestion or not made little difference in the way my reaction must have affected her. She had come to meet me, hoping to hear my praises and pledges, to stand with me before a priest.

Undoubtedly she understood my refusal to be her lover but could I not have been more kindly toward her? Could I not have said, parenthetically, that it was in reality Guaracco I refused, that on some happier occasion . . . Like many a man leaving a stormy center I was aware of fully a score of things I should have said and done.

I was also aware that I loved Lisa. There was no getting away from that even when I tried to say that it was all Guaracco's adroit suggestion, that he might have hypnotized me as well as Lisa from the first day he had introduced us to each other.

Conjectures about it were only the more disturbing. Finally I gave up the struggle against my new realization. I loved Lisa and probably I had lost her. There was nothing I could do about it, I told myself, as I drew near to the *bottega*, turned my footsteps to enter at the door.

A final glow of rage swelled all through me. I yearned wildly for an opportunity to catch Guaracco off guard, to strike and throttle him. A mood, rare in me, made my heart and body thirst for violent action.

As Fate would have it, violent action was about to be provided for my needs.

A horseman came cantering along the street. His horse, a handsome gray, spurned a loose stone from its place among the cobblestones. Another moment and the beast had stumbled and fallen, throwing its rider headlong.

A crowd of strolling pedestrians

within view of the mishap all hurried close, myself among them. My hand went out to lift the sprawling man but with a grunt and an oath he had scrambled to his feet and was tugging at the bridle of his horse. It would not rise.

"The beast is hurt," I suggested.

"Not this devil-begotten nag," growled the rider. He dragged on the bridle again, then kicked the animal's gray ribs with his sharp-toed boot.

Harshness to animals has never pleased me and, as I have said, my anger was ready to rise at anything. I shouted immediate and strong protest. The man turned upon me. He was tall and sturdy with a forked black beard and two square front teeth showing under a short upper lip. He wore a long sword under his cloak of brown silk and had the look of a tough customer.

"Do not meddle between me and my horseflesh," he snapped and once more heaved at the bridle.

The injured horse struggled up at last, driving the little crowd back on all sides, and the master laughed shortly. "Did I not say he was unhurt? Belly of Bacchus, it was his careless foot that threw us—curse it and him!"

He clutched the bit of the poor beast, and struck it across the face with his riding whip.

"Stop that!" I shouted and caught his arm. He tried to pull loose but I was as strong as he. A moment later he had released the horse, which a passerby seized by the reins, and cut at me with the whip. My left hand lashed out, as quick as impulse. It smote solidly on those two front teeth and the man-at-arms staggered back with a roar.

I would have struck again, perhaps stretching him on the cobbles, had not Andrea del Verrocchio himself, running from his door, thrown his arms around me. Meanwhile the black-bearded man had whipped out his sword and, swearing in a blood-

curdling manner, was struggling to throw off two voluble peacemakers and get at me.

"Have you gone mad, boy?" Verrocchio panted in my ear. "That is Gido, the first swordsman of Lorenzo's palace guard!"

CHAPTER VI

SWORDS BESIDE THE RIVER

WHEN I say that I did not flinch at Verrocchio's warning I do not call myself brave—only possessed by a white heat of anger. For a moment I made as if to rush fairly upon the point of Gido's sword. But a saving ounce of wit returned to me.

My eye caught a gleam at the hip of one of the growing throng of watchers. I made a long leaping stride at the fellow and before he knew I was there I had clutched and plucked away his long straight blade.

"Thank you, friend," I said to him hastily. "I will return this steel when I have settled accounts with *Ser Gido* the ruffier."

Gido was roaring like a profane bull. He cursed me by every holy Christian name and some that smacked of the classic Greek and Roman. But by now I had recovered my own self-possession sufficiently to make me recognize my danger and face it. I thrust away Verrocchio's pleading hands and interrupted Gido in the middle of a sulphurous rodomontade.

"You talk too loudly for a fighting man," I told him. "Come, I am no burgher. Let him go, you good people. He needs blood-letting to ease his hot temper."

"There shall be blood-letting enough and to spare!" the palace guardsman promised me balefully.

Verrocchio pleaded that there be no brawl outside his house but Gido loudly claimed that there must be a

back courtyard where we could have quiet for our work. And, with the crowd clamoring and pushing after us, to that back courtyard we went through a little gate at the side of the *bottega*.

There was a level space flagged with stones at the grassy brink of the Arno. All the spectators jammed close to the walls of the house and its paling at the sides while my adversary and myself stood free near the water.

Gido gave me a quick businesslike scrutiny that had something in it of relish—the sort of gaze that a carver might bestow upon a roast. With a quick flirt of his left arm he wound his brown cloak around his elbow to serve as buckler.

"I will teach you to defy your betters, Master Paint-smearer!" he promised.

"Teach on!" I urged him. "I may be a good enough pupil to outshine my teacher."

All this time I was telling myself to be calm, ruthless and wide-awake, that I must not fear the raw point. I had done some fencing in prep school and at my university and it was another thing that I remembered fairly well, with my hand if not my head. I felt that I had a certain advantage too in being left-handed.

We moved toward each other by common consent, gingerly taking the stylized paper-doll pose of fencers. As my left hand advanced my sword, Gido saw that he would have trouble shielding himself with that wadded cloak.

"Fortune favors the right," he muttered and his square front teeth gleamed with pleasure at his own pun.

For answer I made a quick simple attack. It was no more than a feeling thrust and he swept it aside with an easy shifting of his straight blade. At once I made a recovery, ready to parry his riposte.

The riposte did not come. Instead

this crack swordsman of the Medici tried to beat down my weapon and so clear the way for a stab at my breast. I yielded a little before his pressure, disengaged, parried in turn, dropped back. Another of his slashing assaults I only half-broke with my edge and felt the delicate sting of his edge upon my left forearm.

"First blood!" yelled one of the watchers and a little cheer went up for my enemy. The Florentines were enjoying the sport.

But I was not injured as far as my activity was concerned. As Gido rushed to follow his advantage I was able to parry cleanly. Immediately, while he was yet extended in his forward lunge and well within reach, I sped my riposte. It caught him unprepared and he barely flung up his cloak-swaddled left arm in time.

Through half a dozen thicknesses of brown cloth my edge bit its way. Gido swore as his blood sprang out to dye the fabric a deep red.

"He who bleeds last bleeds longest," I paraphrased and made a sweeping slash on my own account.

Gido had to spring all the way back to escape and upon his face dawned an expression of perplexed concern.

Was this the best swordsman that the Medici could send against a raw student of the arts? I felt a little perplexity on my own account. Gido had the look and, with Verrocchio at least, the reputation of a seasoned fighter. Yet he was doing no more than enough to hold his own against my sword. He had misad a chance to riposte at my first attack and a moment later he had been foolishly open to my own riposte.

AS OUR blades grated together again I found the answer in my own semi-obscured memory. Riposte, that was it—or rather the lack of riposte. The movement, the counter-attack made when your opponent's thrust has been parried and he has

not yet recovered, is in great measure instinctive. But in these Renaissance times it was not rationalized, was not yet made a definite pseudo-reflex of swordplay.* I, knowing the formal science of it, had a great advantage. I could win by it.

"Fight, you knave!" I taunted Gido as my steel pressed against his. "I'll cut you into flitches like a pig."

Again he thrust wildly in his angry terror and again I warded. Then, with a quick straightening of my arm, I touched him before he could recover. My point snagged his bearded cheek and a great thread of gore showed. This time the onlookers cheered for me.

Gido retreated once more, two paces this time. His face frankly showed terror. "He is a devil," he choked out. "He knows a secret

thrust. *Unfair!*"

"I will show my secret, drive it to your heart," I growled back, pressing forward after him. "Fight, man, or I will butcher you!"

He tried for a moment to oppose me, then fled again from my menacing point. Now that his nerve was gone he could barely hold up his sword.

"I cannot stand against you," he mumbled wretchedly.

"Show him mercy," called Vescrochio to me and I half lowered my weapon.

Gido saw and struck. Only a quick recovery of my guard saved my life. I roared wordlessly and sprang upon him. My first sweeping slash he parried, the second almost cut away his left arm. He staggered back and tried unsuccessfully to hold off my long point thrust but I got home deep between his ribs. Pulling away

[Turn page]

*No scientific treatment of the riposte in swordplay is to be found in any manual of the exercise before the late seventeenth century.



...oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but not Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like a mane . . . and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



*Hair looks better...
scalp feels better...
when you check Dry Scalp*

IT'S GREAT! Try it! See what a big difference 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic makes in the good looks of your hair. Just a few drops daily check loose dandruff and those other annoying signs of Dry Scalp. . . spruce up your hair quickly and effectively. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients.

Vaseline HAIR TONIC
TRADE MARK

Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN, starring JEAN HERSHOLT, on CBS Wednesday nights.

he ran like a boy caught stealing fruit and I ran after him.

He gained the gate that led to the street, leaning for a moment upon it. Half a dozen of the onlookers rushed to bar my way, pleading that I was already the winner, but my rage was up again. I struggled through their arms and after Gido.

He had gone through the gate, fallen through it. As I came into the street with the throng at my heels I almost trod upon my adversary. He lay sprawled across the curb and into the gutter, his sword under him, blood gushing from his mouth and drenching his black beard. He had only life enough to grope in his pierced bosom, pull forth a crucifix of silver and try to kiss it.

The fight and the fury went out of me as I watched him die, for it was the first violent death I had ever witnessed. I looked around at the staring scared faces, saw among them that of the man whose sword I had snatched.

"Take back your weapon," I said to him but he drew fearfully away from me.

Hoofs were thundering on the cobblestones. The knot of people pressed back to the front of the *bottega* and let a little cloud of horsemen approach. A voice shouted commandingly and there was a quick orderly dismounting. One of the armored men stopped to gaze at the body.

"Gido!" he grunted. "Slain!"

"What?" demanded a voice from behind. "Gido, you say? Who slew him?"

Two men, richly dressed, had remained upon their superb horses. One of them reined in almost above me. He was a handsome dark youngster, no older than I, with abundant curls descending from under his plumed velvet cap to the shoulders of his plum-colored *houppelande* or gownlike outer garment. His belt, gloves and boots were embroidered

with massy gold. He stared at the body of Gido, at me, at the bloody sword I still held.

It was the other, sitting his steed just beyond, who had spoken. He was also young, tall and rugged with harpies blazoned richly upon the breast of his surcoat. His strong face, framed between sweeps of straight black hair, had broad fiercely-ugly features. Above the right corner of his mouth grew a wart. To me his appearance suggested something of my former life—a painting or statue.

"Gido," he said again. "My own peerless Gido—slain!"

Here upon me had ridden Lorenzo the Magnificent, absolute ruler of the city of Florence!

And now, the eyes of this great despot, prince in all but name, had fastened upon me. Bright deadly intent flared from them, like fire from black flint.

"Is that the assassin?" he demanded. "Seize him, some of you."

I turned toward him. "I am no assassin, Your Magnificence," I protested. "It was a fair fight and this guardsman of yours forced—"

But as I began to speak two of the men in mail and leather moved swiftly to my right elbow and my left. The iron gauntlet of one snatched away my sword and the other man roughly caught my shoulder.

"Silence!" he growled in my ear. "Speak when you are spoken to."

Others of the party were busy questioning witnesses, who were many and unfriendly. Lorenzo de Medici, after favoring me with another long searching look, turned away. "Bring that fellow," he ordered my captors.

"Can you ride?" I was asked and when I nodded the gray horse of Gido, the same over which we had quarreled, was led forward. I

* Lorenzo de Medici, who ruled with his brother Giuliano in Florence from 1489, was the true founder of Florentine greatness and was a most benevolent despot until his death in 1492.

mounted and one of the men-at-arms caught the bridle reins in the crook of his arm. The other sidled his horse against me.

"Come," he said. "You are going to prison. If you try to escape, if you but move as though to leave us"—his voice grew harder still—"my sword will shed your tripes upon the street."

CHAPTER VII

LORENZO THE MAGNIFICENT

LORENZO and his handsome companion had ridden on. Behind him rode his retinue, one of them with Gido's limp body across his saddlebow. I myself, on the gray, brought up the rear with the two guards.

As we departed I glanced back at the *bottega*. The crowd was moving and murmuring and in its midst stood Andrea de Verrocchio, staring after me through his spectacles.

We had not ridden much more than two miles and had made few turns before our little procession entered a great paved yard before a white stone palace. A groom appeared to lead away the horses of Lorenzo and his companion while the soldiers rode around to a guard-house at the rear, leading me with them.

Through a small barred door I was ushered into the palace building, then through a hallway in which stood a sentry in breastplate and steel cap. Finally I was escorted into a small room, finished in great rough stones and with a single iron-latticed window. It had one stool, no carpet and no table.

"Await here your punishment," one of my captors bade me and I was locked in.

I waited. There was nothing to do but think, nothing to think but

doleful thoughts. My victory over the bully swordsman, mingled as it was with luck and knowledge from another century, had brought me not fame but disaster. Lorenzo de Medici himself had seen fit to notice me—and with anger. I knew well that this scion of a great and unscrupulous race had the power of life and death in Florence and that in my case the power of death was more apt to be exercised than the power of life.

To be sure I had been drawn on first, had fought only in self-defense. But what judge would hear me? Lorenzo, who through me had lost a valued servant. What jury would ponder my case? No jury. I might not be allowed to speak in my own defense even. A nod, a word—and I would be condemned to death with nobody to question or to mourn.

Nobody? What about Lisa? But I had to put her from my mind.

Thus I mused in the blackest of humors until a faint stirring sound at the window made me lift my eyes. A small childlike face hung there—the face of the deceptively handsome dwarf of Guaracco.

He cautioned me to silence with a tiny finger on his lips, then, with the utmost suppleness and skill, thrust his wisp of a body between the iron bars. How even so small a creature could do it I have no idea—but in two seconds he stood in front of me, smoothing out the wrinkles of his little surcoat.

"What do you here?" I demanded. "It was easy." He chuckled. "By a vine I swung from the street and over the wall. In a tuft of brambles I lurked until the sentry walked by. I am here with a message from Ser Guaracco, your master and mine."

"Well?" I prompted, a faint hope wakening in me. Guaracco had claimed some influence. Perhaps he was bestirring himself on my behalf.

"The message," said the dwarf, "is this—hanging is an easy death and a swift one."

"Hanging?" I echoed. "I am to be hanged?"

"Perhaps." The little head wagged wisely. "That is the punishment for brawlers and killers in hot blood. But there are other punishments." He smiled up impudently. "A witch, a devil's apostle, for instance, may be burned at the stake. By comparison a sorry end."

I grew ironic myself. "Your riddles become easy to read, imp." I said. "Ser Guaracco is anxious that I make no claims of coming to him miraculously—that I say nothing of being nourished and ordered to assist him in his intrigues."

"They breed quick minds where you come from," said the dwarf.

"Go back," I told him, "and say that I know his selfish reason but that his advice is good. I will not involve him in my ruin. Better to hang than to burn."

THE little fellow nodded quickly, turned and wriggled out between the bars like a lizard. Time wore on, and I felt weary and hungry. Finally, pushing my stool back so that I could lean in the corner, I dozed off. A rough voice awakened me.

"God's wounds, knave, you do slumber at the very lip of death! Rise and come with me. Lorenzo the Magnificent has sent for you."

I got to my feet and rubbed my eyes. Night had come and I walked out of my dark cell toward the light held at the open door. Two men in steel-mounted leather waited, a bristle-bearded captain and a lanky swordsman with a scarred cheek.

Between them I walked away into a long hall, around a corner, across an open courtyard—it was a clear starry night overhead—and into a building beyond. A sentry challenged us in the arras-hung vestibule we entered. At an explanatory word from the bearded captain he waved us on through a curtained doorway.

The room in which we came to a halt was not spacious but lofty,

lighted by no less than eight lamps on tables and brackets or hung by chains from the groined ceiling. The walls were frescoed with scenes and figures of Grecian mythology and the floor was richly carpeted.

At a table of polished ebony with inlaid borders and figures of ivory sat Lorenzo de Medici in a magnificent dove-gray *houppelande* with furred neck and wrists. His ugly face was toward us. Beside him was stationed a scribe or secretary in the hooded gown of a monk, busy with pen and ink.

But, standing before the table with back toward us was a long, spare man with a red pate. He could be none but Guaracco. And he was speaking as we entered in the gentle, plausible manner he could affect so well. "Magnificence," he was saying smoothly, "if to be related to the young man is a crime I must plead guilty. It is true that I arranged for his education, as Ser Andrea Verrocchio testified before you just now. But concerning this butchery of your poor servant I must say that I have no reaction save surprise and sorrow."

He was clearing his skirts of me then.

Lorenzo leaned back in his chair of state. It was a square-made armchair of massive carved wood.

"I wonder, I wonder," the ruler of Florence almost crooned. His eyes probed Guaracco like sharp points and if anything could unsettle the sorcerer-scientist's aplomb it would be such a regard. "It is possible," continued Lorenzo, "that you assigned him to the task of murdering Gido? But here is the young man himself. His story may be revealing."

The captain who had brought me now thrust me forward with a push of thick knuckles in my back. Lorenzo's eyes met mine and I returned him as level a stare as possible.

"Stand aside, Guaracco," commanded Lorenzo. "Now, young man,

your name?"

"Leo Thrasher," I replied.

"Leo—*what*?" Lorenzo shook his head over my surname, which all Italians have found difficult. The clerk, pen in hand, asked me how to spell it.

"A barbarous cognomen, which bespeaks the barbarous fellow," remarked Lorenzo sententiously. "What defense have you to offer?"

"Only that I did not murder your guardsman but killed him in a fair fight." I made respectful reply.

GUARACCO, standing against the wall, gave me a little nod of approval and drew in his lips as though to council prudence.

Lorenzo turned and took several sheets of writing from his monkish companion. "According to the testimony of others you were the aggressor," said he. "You interfered and struck him after he had fallen from his horse."

"He flogged the beast cruelly," I protested. "I used my bare fist upon him and he drew his sword. I say I but defended myself."

"Do not contradict His Magnificence," the middle-aged clerk cautioned me bleakly.

"And do not traduce the name of poor dead Gido," added Lorenzo. His eyes still raked me. "I have lost a good servant in him."

"Perhaps," I said, on sudden inspiration, "I can make good his loss."

"How?" exclaimed Lorenzo, and his black eyes narrowed. "As a swordsman in my guard? But Gido had conquered hundreds."

"I conquered Gido," I reminded him despite the fact that Guaracco was signaling again for prudence. Lorenzo saw those signals and turned in his chair.

"Ha, Guaracco, by the bones of the saints! I do begin to understand it. You'll have planned that this creature of yours might rise on the dead shoulders of his victim and be taken

into my service as an invincible blade. Then, being near me and myself unguarded—"

"As heaven is my judge, this is not my doing!" exclaimed Guaracco, unstrung at last.

I spoke again, to save myself and him too. "If I cannot be trusted to guard Your Magnificence I have other worthy gifts." I thought a moment, marshaling what latter-day science my memory still retained. "I can build bridges. I can make war machines of various kinds. I can show you how to destroy fortresses."

"Indeed?" broke in Lorenzo. "How came you by all this knowledge? More of Guaracco's doing, I make no doubt. He is whispered to be a sorcerer." Another of his darted sidelong looks made the tall man shake violently. "You too, young man? Death is the severe penalty for black magic."

I recognized defeat and shrugged my shoulders in exasperation. "I shall not weary you with further pleas, Your Magnificence," I said. "Call me wizard as well as murderer. I am neither but all are determined to destroy me. As well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb."

The captain at my elbow made a motion as though to drag me away but Lorenzo lifted one long white hand with a many-jeweled ring upon the forefinger. "Wait! Tell me—what was that you said?"

"I said, as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb."

"Hanged for a sheep as for a—" A grin came slowly, as if it did not well know the way to that rugged face. It made Lorenzo strangely handsome. "Neatly said, by Bacchus!" He spoke to the clerk. "Write that down. Here we have one gift that was never won from yonder dull Guaracco."

I was stunned at the zest with which he repeated the cliché. "Why, Your Magnificence!" I said, wonderingly. "It is but a saying, a handful of old words."

"Yet the thought is new, a new thing under the sun. Say on, Leo the Witty. If you are an assassin set to kill me your tongue is as tempered as your sword."

He called the phrase new and of course it was.

The fifteenth century had never heard of it before. Every cliché must have been devastating in its time.

I GROPED in my mind for another and the works of William Shakespeare, a good century in the future, came to my rescue.

"Since I am graciously permitted to plead my case once more," I said, "let me but remind Your Magnificence that the quality of mercy is not strained. It drops as the gentle rain from heaven upon the earth beneath—"

"Excellent!" applauded Lorenzo. "Clerk, have you written it all?" He smiled upon me the more widely and winningly. "You go free, young sir. Swordsmen I can buy at a ducat a dozen but men of good wit and ready tongue are scarce in these decayed times. Tomorrow then you shall have a further audience with me."

I bowed myself away, scarce crediting my good fortune. But as I walked down the palace steps and through the gate Guaracco fell into step beside me.

Under his half-draped black cloak I caught the outline of that pistol he had invented.

"I have nothing to say to you," I growled. "I have washed my hands of you. And you washed your hands of me yonder when my life hung by a thread."

"I never pledged myself to you," he reminded. "Nor did I demand a pledge of you—only obedience. Instead of death you win favor from the Medici. When you go back tomorrow you go under new orders from me."

And thus I was deeper than ever in his strong wicked clutch.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COURT OF LORENZO

PERHAPS it is odd and yet not so odd that I remember no more of that particular walk, of my warm disgust at Guaracco's confident leer, of his insistence on my aid to him. It is my fixed belief that during our conversation he found and took the opportunity to throw upon me his hypnotic spell. He could do that almost as well as the best twentieth-century psychologists.

Walking together thus on the way to Verrocchio's *bottega*, I entranced and somnambulistic, he alert and studied, there must have been strong talking by Guaracco and receptive listening by me. He must have planted in my dream-bound mind that I was his friend and debtor, that I must share Lorenzo's favor with him, Guaracco.

What I do remember is the next afternoon and an equerry from the palace presenting himself before an impressed Verrocchio with a message summoning me to his master. I went, clad in my simple best—the decent doublet and hose which Guaracco had given me on my first evening at his house, my red mantle and a flat velvet cap with a long drooping feather. With a little shock of pleased astonishment I saw that the equerry had brought me a horse—the same fine gray over which I had fallen out with the late lamented Gido.

"The beast is a present from the Magnificent," I was informed as I mounted.

To the palace we rode and there, while my horse was cared for by the equerry, I was conducted through a great courtyard to a rich garden among high hedges of yew, trimmed to a blocky evenness with nichelike hollows for stone seats or white

statues of Grecian style.

There were roses, both on bushes and climbing briars, flowering shrubs in clumps and ordered rows, a perfectly round little pool with water lilies—all luxurious and lovely though perhaps a bit too formally ordered. In the center of this, under a striped awning, lounged Lorenzo and his friends on cushioned seats of gilded wood and leather.

To the four other guests I was introduced as *Ser Leo*. His Magnificence still shied at pronouncing my barbarous surname. And I bowed to each as his name was spoken. First there was Lorenzo's younger brother and co-despot, Guiliano, the same cavalier who had ridden with Lorenzo upon me at the moment of Gido's death. He was one of the handsomest men I have ever seen, even as Lorenzo was one of the ugliest.

Almost as highly honored was an elderly churchman with a fine merry face and plain but rich vestments—Mariotto Arlotto, the aristocratic abbot of the woodland monastery of Camaldoli. His repute, I found, was that his repartee was the sharpest and readiest in all the state of Tuscany and indeed he jested in a lively though ecclesiastical fashion.

Close beside him stood a plump courteous young man in his middle twenties, Sandro Botticelli, the rising court painter.* Him I found friendly though moody.

The last man of the group and the youngest was an adolescent poet, Agnolo Poliziano. Uglier even than Lorenzo, he was wry-necked, crooked-mouthed, beak-nosed and bandy-legged.** Yet for all his sorry person and ungrown youth, he was eloquent and thoroughly educated. From him I was to learn in

after days much of what a man must know to shine as cultured in Fifteenth-Century Florence.

"A young sparkle-wit, friends," Lorenzo told the others in presenting me. "He was thrown my way, I nothing doubt, with the thought that he might assassinate me. Yet am I drawn to him by the lustrant wisdom of his speech. 'As well hang for a sheep as for a lamb,' he defied me yesterday."

He paused while the saying went around the delighted group from mouth to merry mouth.

"If he is dangerous, yet shall I keep him as I keep the lions at the Piazza del Signoria. Guard me, all of you, from any weapon save his tongue." Once more he turned to me. "What of that sorcerer cousin of yours, Guaracco?"

To my own surprise I found myself pleading earnestly and eloquently for Guaracco. It was as if I had been rehearsed in the task and indeed I probably was by Guaracco himself. Hypnotista, I say again, can do such things. In the end Lorenzo smiled and seemed far less ugly.

"By the mass, I wish my own kinsmen spoke so well on my behalf," he said to the others. "*Ser Leo*, your eloquence saved you yesterday and today it recommends Guaracco. He is dull, I have thought, but he knows something of science. I am minded to send for him for all he is a wizard."

"Sorcery cannot prevail against pure hearts," contributed the Abbot Mariotto at which all laughed heartily.

THE equerry who had conducted me was dispatched to search for and bring Guaracco. Meanwhile I was served with wine by a bold-eyed maidservant in tight blue silk and entreated to join the conversation. It was turning just then on the subject of a new alliance of the Italian

* Botticelli's most famous paintings are those of Giuliano's sweetheart, Simonetta Vespucio. He was a favorite of Florentine society, and a loyal friend of the Medici.

** Poliziano, in later life, was a tutor to the children of Lorenzo, and remained in the Medici household until the death of his patron.

powers against possible Turkish invasion.

"The threat of the infidel comes at an opportune time," Lorenzo pointed out. "Taunted and menaced, we Christians forget our differences and draw together for our common safety. The Sultan dares not attack us, we dare not quarrel among ourselves and peace reigns."

"Your Magnificence does not like war then?" I ventured.

He shook his ugly crag of a head. "Not a whit. It is expensive."

"And vulgar," added Botticelli.

"Aye, and dangerous," chimed in the poet Poliziano.

"And in defiance of heaven's will," sighed the abbot as though to crown the matter.

"And yet," Lorenzo resumed, "I bethink me that it is well for a state to prepare for war that others may fear and be content to keep peace. I have it in mind, *Ser Leo*, that you spoke yesterday of war engines."

"I did," was my reply, but even as I spoke I was aware how poorly my scrambled memory might serve me. "For instance, I might design a gun that shoots many times."

"Ha, some of Guaracco's witchcraft!" exclaimed Lorenzo at once.

"Not in the least," I made haste to say. "Nothing but honest science and mechanics, may it please Your Magnificence."

In my mind the form and principle of machine-gunnery became only half clear. I wished that I had mentioned something else.

But Lorenzo would not be dissuaded from knowing all about my off-shooting gun. He sent Poliziano for paper and pencils and ordered me to draw plans. I made shift in some fashion to do a picture of a gun-carriage with wheels, a tail and a mounting of not one barrel but a whole row, ten or more.

* Lorenzo was later able to bring about this alliance both for peace among the Italian powers and safety from the Moslem raiders.

"It is nothing of particular brilliance," objected the poet. "A rank of arquebusiers would serve as well."

"Aye, but if we have not overmany ranks of arquebusiers?" countered Lorenzo and gave me a most generous smile. "A single man, I think, could serve and aim and fire this row of guns. Ten such machines could offer a full hundred shot. Well aimed and rightly discharged that hundred shot might decide a great battle."

Encouraged, I offered a variation of the idea, a larger and wider gun emplacement with not small barrels but regular cannon placed in a row and slightly slanted toward the center. These, I suggested, could be so trained as to center their fire on a single point. The bank of cannon, wheeled into position and the fuses lighted in quick succession, could throw a shower of heavy shot against a single small area upon a rampart or wall, battering it open.

"Right you are!" applauded Lorenzo. "It would outline the greatest battering-ram in all Christendom."

"It may be improved," I continued, "by explosive shot in the cannon."

"Explosive shot?" Guilianno repeated in sharp protest. "How, *Ser Leo*? Is not all shot solid? Can lead and iron explode?"

"Yes, with powder and a fuse inside," I said at once though none too surely.

"Nay, nay," he argued. "What would prevent such a shot from exploding in the very mouth of the cannon, belike splitting its barrel and doing injury to our own soldiers?"

I had to shake my head, saying that I could not answer definitely just then.

"Then answer another time," said Lorenzo kindly. "In the meanwhile"—he picked up my two drawings—"these will go to my armorers for models to be made. *Ser Leo* can draw us other things as well."

WHERE DID IT COME FROM? HOW DID IT GET HERE?

WHAT IS IT?

THE THING

from Another World!

HOWARD HAWKS' *Amazing* MOVIE!



"He draws notably," contributed Botticelli.

Evening had drawn on, lamps were lighted and we had supper in the garden, a richer and spicier meal than I care for. There was plenty of wine and all drank freely of it, not excepting the abbot. Finally some fruits and ice-cooled sherbet were brought and as this dessert was being served we were joined by five or six ladies.

Most beautiful and arresting among these was the famous Simonetta Vespucci, the reigning toast of Florence. She was no more than eighteen years old, as I judged, but mature in body and manner, a tall, slenderly elegant lady, a little sloping in the shoulders but otherwise beyond criticism in the perfection of her figure. Her abundant hair gleamed golden and her proud face was at once warmly and purely handsome.

All the men were her frank and devoted admirers. I have heard that the very shopkeepers and artisans who saw her pass on the street were wont to roll their eyes in awe at her loveliness, even to fight jealously over this noble creature they dared not address.

Of those present she appeared to prefer the dark dashing Giuliano de Medici.

"I fear that it will be a hot summer," she mourned as she finished her sherbet. "There will be little ice left in the storehouses, even now."

"Nay then," I made haste to say. "Ice may be kept through the hottest months if it is placed in houses banked with earth." I quickly sketched such a half-buried shed. "And also let the ice be covered deep with sawdust and chaff."

"How?" demanded the painter, Botticelli. "I have known chaff to be placed over fruit in a shop and so

keep it from freezing. If chaff keeps fruit warm, will it also make ice cold?"

I WAS on the point of launching into a discussion of refrigeration and insulation but prudently stopped short. "It does indeed bring coldness," I assured him. "Or rather it keeps the coldness that is there already."

"Black magic," muttered Abbot Mariotto, crossing himself with a beringed hand.

"Nay, white magic," decided Lorenzo, "for it does good on earth, does it not, and no harm to any creature? Ser Leo, do you guarantee that ice will thus remain through the summer and not perish?" He turned to a servant. "Go you," he ordered, "and summon a secretary." And then to me, "He shall make notes of what you say, young sir, and tomorrow shall see the building of such a house. Therein my ice shall lie with good store of chaff to insure its cold."

"This strange young man is a learned doctor," said the silvery voice of a lady, who toyed with a goblet of jeweled gold.

"Does he not know of more exalted things than chaff and houses buried in the earth?" asked Simonetta Vespucci, deigning to smile upon me. "Ser Leo—for so you seem to be called—can you not tell us a tale of these stars, which now wink out in the sky and float above our earth?"

Her eyes and her smile dazzled me, understandably, along with any man on whom they turned. Perhaps that is why I ventured to dazzle her in turn.

"Madonna Simonetta," I said, "permit me to say that those stars are worlds, greater than ours."

"Greater than ours?" she cried and laughed most musically. "But they are no more than twinklets, full of spikes and beams, like little shining burrs."

"They are far away, Madonna," I

said. "A man, if only at the distance of a hundred paces, appears so small that he can be contained within the eye of a needle held close before you. So with these bodies, which are like the sun—"

"The sun!" she interrupted. "The sun, Ser Leo, is round, not full of points like a star."

There was applause at her lively protest from all the men and most of the women. For answer, I took up a sheet of the paper on which I had been sketching, and asked for the loan of a pin. One of the ladies had a silver bodkin in her cap and offered it. With this I pierced a hole in the paper.

"Madonna"—I addressed Simonetta—"hold this hole to your eye and look through it. The smallness of the opening will shut away the glitter . . . So, you do it correctly. Now"—I pointed to where, in the evening sky, hung shimmering Jupiter—"look yonder. Is that star, seen through the hole in your paper, a burr or a small round body?"

"This is marvelous," she exclaimed. "It is indeed round, like a gold coin seen from a distance."

The others cried out in equal astonishment and each must needs look through the hole in the paper at Jupiter. I turned over in my mind the possibilities of explaining a telescope but decided not to offer another foggy theory that I could not support with exact plans or models. I contented myself with attempting to lecture on astronomy.

"Gentlemen and fair ladies," I said as impressively as I could manage, "these stars look so small that nothing appears less, yet there are a great many that are far larger than our own Earth. Think then how trivial our own star would appear if—"

"Faith, Cousin," called out a voice I knew, "you seek to belittle the world and Florence and Lorenzo the Magnificent!"

It was Guaracco, absolutely over-

whelming in green and gold, who strode forward and paid fulsomely cordial respects all around.

"Forgive my young kinsman, Your Magnificence, if he has been impertinent," he pleaded eloquently. Then, turning to me, "Will you step aside, Leo? I have a message for you from Lisa."

At the mention of that name a little murmur of laughing congratulation went up to the effect that I must have a sweetheart. Indeed I felt a quickening of my pulse as Guaracco and I walked a little away through the garden, out of the range of the lamplight.

"What is the message from her?" I asked him.

"That was but an excuse to get you alone," he growled. "I warn you, Leo, say no more of these matters of the stars."

"But why not?" I demanded, surprised.

"The stars in their courses are a specific knowledge of sorcerers. I overheard your teaching just now that—"

"I was teaching truth," I broke in, warm to defend myself.

"I know it," he said. "I do not think this little mote, our planet, is the center of all things. But the old belief is part of my trade. I frighten or reward or guide men by horoscopes and prophecies—from the stars. Do you not show me a liar, else I may smooth your way to destruction."

I glared at him but in my mind was more wonder than rage. Once again he had revealed himself, for he hid his knowledge and fostered error for profit. Only some great evil wish dictated such action. I need not be too ashamed, I feel, to say that he made me afraid.

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CHAPTER IX

THE END OF THE EVENING

GUARACCO did his best to be the lion of the occasion. Not that he did not merit attention. He could charm and astound and inform. Lorenzo publicly and good-humoredly withdrew his previous opinion that Guaracco was dull and bade him talk on any subject he would. Strange philosophy-crammed conversation intrigued Lorenzo, as the jokes of a jester or the gambols of jugglers might intrigue a more shallow ruler.

And Guaracco obliged with improvements upon my discussion of war machines. To my multiple-fire device he added a suggestion whereby the crossbows of Lorenzo's guard might be improved—a quick simple lever to draw and set the string instead of the slower and more cumbersome *moulinet* or crank.

The company praised and approved the idea, and Guaracco beamed. He liked it less when Botticelli suggested and Lorenzo agreed that I make clearer his rough sketch of the lever action.

"I perceive"—Guaracco smiled satirically—"that you also admire my kinsman's drawing. Has he told you of that other talent he hopes to develop? Flying?"

"Flying?" repeated the beautiful Simonetta, her eyes shining.

"Aye, that. With a machine called an 'airplane.'"

He used the Twentieth-Century English word, and I must have started visibly. How did he know that name and invention? I did not remember telling him about airplanes. But Simonetta was already laughing incredulously.

"Belike this young man seeks to soar with wings and reach those great worlds and suns he pretends

to see in the sky," she suggested merrily, a twinkle in her eyes.

"It sounds like sacrilege," Giuliano garnished his sweetheart's apparent effort to embarrass me. "Flight is contrary to man's proper nature."

I was a little angry. "How contrary?" I demanded. "Is it more contrary or sacrilegious than to ride comfortably and swiftly on the back of a horse?"

The abbot came to my support. "The young man says sooth," he pronounced. "Holy writ sings of the righteous—'They shall mount up with wings as eagles'—and again, in the words of the Psalmist himself—'O, that I had wings like a dove!' Surely such flight would not be ungodly unless it were accomplished by the aid of black magic."

"Well, *Ser Leo*?" Lorenzo prompted me.

He leaned back in his cushioned chair of state, crossing one long nobby leg over the other. His companions grouped themselves gracefully if sycophantically around him. All were awaiting my reply to the abbot's last suggestion.

"Your Magnificence, there is no such thing as black magic," I said, "either in my devices or elsewhere."

Every eye widened and Guaracco stiffened as though I had prodded him with a dagger. I remembered that he had come close to frightening me not an hour before and determined to make some amends to my own self-respect.

"Of all human discourses," I elaborated warmly, watching him, "the most foolish is that which affirms a belief in necromancy." Guaracco glared but I did not hesitate. "If this necromancy or black magic did truly exist, he who controlled it would be lord of all nations and no human skill could resist him."

"Buried treasure and the jewels of Earth's heart would lie manifest to him. No lock, no fortress, could remain shut against his will. He

could remain shut up or travel the uttermost parts of the Universe. But why do I go on adding instance to instance? What could not be brought to pass by such a mechanician?"

As I finished there was a sigh, a mutter and finally Lorenzo struck his hands together in applause. "Well said, *Ser Leo*!" he cried. "Do you not think so, Guaracco? Does this not prove that there are no sorcerers?"

"It proves, at least, my innocence of the charge of sorcery," Guaracco smiled and bowed to give the reply strength. "If I could do such things, would I be so humble and dependent a servant of Your Magnificence? Surely"—his eyes found mine once more—"nothing is impossible to a true necromancer."

"Nothing," I agreed, "except refuge from death."

His smile vanished.

Lorenzo lolled more easily in his chair. "This bethinks me," he remarked. "One matter has not been settled. *Ser Leo* is a boy, a student of the arts, yet he conquered with ease my nonpareil swordsman. That smacks of enchantment."

I spread my hands in one of the free Florentine gestures I was beginning to use. "I make bold to deny that it was aught but skill."

"We must make trial."

His Magnificence permitted himself another faint grin. I must have shown an expression of worry, for Giuliano burst out into confident laughter and sprang forward, hand on hilt.

"Let me do the trying," he cried, his gay handsome face thrusting at me in the white light of the lamps.

SIMONETTA'S silvery chuckle applauded her cavalier. The abbot also called for this unecclesiastical performance to take place without delay. Before I well knew what was happening, the chairs, benches and

other furniture had been thrust back, the lamps trimmed to give more light and I faced Giuliano in the center of the cleared space. Poliziano had run to fetch something and he came close to me.

"Here, young sir," he said. "Defend yourself." And he thrust a hard object into my hand.

Giuliano had already drawn his sword and wadded his cloak into a protection on his free arm. I transferred my own weapon to my left arm and at sight of it my heart sank. It was a mere cane of wood, hard and round and of a sword's length, such as Florentine lads used for fencing practise. Giuliano, on the other hand, fell en garde with a blade that was one of the finest and sharpest I ever saw. Plainly I was to furnish sport for this gallant and his friends and all advantages were denied me.

Because I must I lifted the cudgel to cross his steel. Lorenzo grunted.

"Your cousin is sinister-handed, Guaracco," he observed. "Belike that is the secret of his skill."

"I fear not," said Giuliano with unmalicious zest and he disengaged and thrust at me.

Apparently he meant business, for the point would have nicked my breast had I not shortened my own arm and beat it aside. Cheers went up from the ladies—then slid into dismayed screams. For, extending my parry to its conclusion as a riposte, I smote Giuliano smartly on the inside of the elbow.

He wheezed in pain and sprang back out of reach. Had I followed and struck again he might have been forced to drop the sword. But I realized that I had to do with the second greatest man in Florence and only stood my ground.

Giuliano laughed again. "God's wounds, what a tinger!" He praised me. "I'll ward it another time."

Forward he came again, right foot advanced, his cloaked left arm brought well up. Again I awaited

his thrust, parried it and drove it out of line, then riposted as before. He, as good as his promise, interposed the folds of the cloak, taking a muffled tap on his left forearm. But that hurt him somewhat and he retreated. This time I followed him, avoided an engagement and half-struck at his head.

But I stopped in time, fearing to injure him and make dangerous enemies. Instead I diverted the course of the stroke into a sweeping *moulinet*, passing over his weapon to my right and his left, and terminated it in a resounding thwack on Giuliano's velvet-sleeved sword arm.

Absolute silence fell, then a murmur of consternation from the on-lookers. For Giuliano's smile had vanished and his eyes flashed fire. Plainly the contest had ceased to be sport with him—my thumps had made him angry. He snapped out a soft blasphemy, advanced quickly and sped a slashing cut—not at me but at my stick. The edge of his steel, keen as a razor, shored through the tough wood without effort and I was left with a mere baton in my hand, a truncated billet no more than fifteen inches long.

"No, no, Giuliano, spare him!" called out Lorenzo—but too late to balk his brother's murderous stab at my throat.

I managed to parry with the short length of wood remaining to me, causing his point to shoot upward and over my left shoulder. At once I stepped forward, well within his lunge. Before he could retreat or recover, my free right hand caught the crossguard of his weapon and wrenched. His own right arm, bruised twice in the previous engagements, had lost some of its strength and in a trice I tore the sword away from him.

At once I dropped my severed stick, fell back and whipped the captured hilt into my left hand.

"By your leave, my lord," I

panted, "I will continue the matter with this more suitable equipment."

But then Lorenzo, Poliziano and Guaracco had sprung forward and between us. The sorcerer caught me in his arms and wrestled me farther back, his red beard rasping my ear as he hissed out a warning to take care. Lorenzo the Magnificent was lecturing Giuliano in the manner of big brothers in every land and generation. And Giuliano recovered his lost temper.

"Hark you, *Ser Leo*, I did amiss," he called out to me, laughing. "I had no lust to hurt you at the beginning. I meant only fun. And then—" He broke off, still grinning, and rubbed his injured arm. "I forgot myself. It is not many who can teach me either swordplay or manners—but, by Saint Michael of the Sword, you have done both!"

IT WAS handsomely said and I gladly gave him back his weapon, assuring him that I bore no ill-will. At that, he embraced me in the impulsive Latin manner, swearing that he would stand my friend forever. The company subsided to chairs again, happy that no harm had befallen either of us.

"We wander from the path of our earlier discourse," reminded Abbot Mariotto tactfully. "*Ser Leo* was speaking of a flying machine. Where is it, my son?"

"It is not yet constructed, Holy Father," I replied.

As with so many other things the principle of flying a heavier-than-air machine was caught only vaguely in the back of my head. I could visualize roughly the form, a thin body with a rudder for tail and outspread wings—and something to stir the air.

"Belike you would strap wings to your arms," suggested Giuliano.

"Impossible," spoke up Poliziano. "Are not man's arms too weak for flight? Would they not need great muscles, at least as strong as those

of the legs?"

I had an inspiration and an answer. "The muscles of our legs are many times stronger than needful to support the weight of our bodies," I told him.

Lorenzo, eager as always for new philosophic diversion, challenged me to prove it. I asked him to get me a long tough plank and servants were sent scurrying after it. While I waited I chose a strong straight chair and sat upon it. A cushion I took and laid upon my knees. When the plank arrived I balanced it upon this cushion.

"Now, come, all of you," I invited, "and rest yourselves upon this plank."

Lorenzo did so at once and then his brother. The others followed laughingly, not excepting the abbot and Madonna Simonetta—ten in all, supported upon my knees. Only Guaracco stood aloof.

"Your long shanks support many hundredweight, stout cousin," he said, "but what does this prove?"

"It proves his argument and the fallacy of mine," handsomely replied Poliziano for me as he rose from his seat at one end of the plank. "His legs have tenfold strength and his arms may be strong in proportion, enough to flap wings and waft upward his entire weight."

"Then let me see it done," pronounced Lorenzo with a grand finality that made my heart sink. "I am ambitious, *Ser Leo*, to watch you 'mount up with wings as eagles.' And I do not forget the other arrangement, by which you will make solid shot to explode."

This last labor, which I had been glad to slight in conversation, now seemed actually the easier.

But Simonetta and the other ladies professed themselves weary of cold science, be it ever so important in a masculine world, and demanded music. Poliziano, whose voice was as sweet as his appearance was ungainly, immediately snatched up a

silver lute and picked out a lively tune. The song he rendered was saucy and merry and not a little shocking—but the holy abbot led the loud applause.

"More! More!" cried Simonetta.

Poliziano, bowing low to her, sang to a more measured and dignified tune, an offering that had all the earmarks of impromptu versification inasmuch as it mentioned the beauty of Simonetta, the magnificence of Lorenzo, the churchly dignity of Abbot Mariotto and, finally, the enigmatic quality of my own discourse.

"And will not *Ser Leo* sing?" asked one of the ladies when Poliziano had made an end. "His conversation and talents are so varied—war, science, debate, flying like a bird—"

"Let us hear your voice, young sir," Lorenzo commanded me.

Thus urged, I took Poliziano's lute, altering the pitch and harmony of its four strings until I could strum upon it in a hit-or-miss fashion, evoking chords to accompany myself. The song I managed to improvise and sing to Poliziano's tune was on the subject of stars, so edifying to my new friends and so distasteful to Guaraccio. Since Lorenzo and the others commended it highly, it may not be amiss to set it down here.

You think I am a spark—I am a star.

You think that I am small but I am great.

You think me dim but I am only far,

Far out in space, beyond your love and hate.

You think me feeble—but I am a sun,

Whose rule is resolute, whose face endures,

Beneath whose heat and light are wonders done,

Throughout a leash of nobler worlds than yours.

You think you know my secrets and you say

[Turn page]

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That they are thus and thus—but
through the sky
My beam strikes from so many
years away,
You know not how I live nor when
I die.

CHAPTER X

THE BOMBS AND THE WINGS

SILENT as we departed from the gathering together, Guaracco soon spoke.

"I know very little, after all, of how you live," he said, "but perhaps I can arrange how and when you die. That song was meant to reproach me."

"Just as you like," I rejoined, for my fear of him had quite departed. Too, I was arraying my spirit against further imposition of his will. "Your masterful ways become burdensome, Guaracco. I defy you."

And I paused near the palace gates, my fists clenched.

"No violence," he warned me. "I carry a sword as well as that short gun you saw yesterday. And my dwarfs are never far away. You, on the other hand, have not yet assumed our Florentine fashion of carrying arms." His beard stirred in the gloom and I knew that he smiled. "But I shall not kill you. Leo, unless you force me. All these defiance stand me in good stead."

"In good stead?" I repeated, for after my temporary semi-hypnotized slavishness nothing had been further from my wish than to aid Guaracco.

"Aye, that. In scorning magic and upholding science you have taught me a lesson and few can boast of teaching me anything of worth. It is time for me to forget my sorcery pretenses, at least where it concerns my relationship to Lorenzo. Science shall be my way with him hereafter—but not too much science. You and

I shall work wonders for him, the two of us."

"Am I to help you?" I sneered.

He shook his head, laughing. "It is I who shall help you. For instance, that matter of exploding shot. I saw, as Lorenzo did not, that you were perplexed. But it happens that I may help you to fashion such a thing. Again, is it not true that you wish to return some day to your own century?"

Useless to deny that and I said so.

"And have you not forgotten many details of your time-reflecting machine?"

Equally useless to deny that.

"For instance," went on Guaracco, "you have forgotten certain ways to use this strange new power which you named to me as electricity. It gives light but how?"

I could not tell him.

"I shall refresh your lost memory. Is there not a certain bottle or globe, exhausted of air—and a wire of some substance set glowing within—"

I clutched his arm, so suddenly fierce that he broke off and swore in startled pain.

"How do you know that?" I demanded. "Yes, I had forgotten entirely. But you knew, and about airplanes as well!"

"Let me go," he commanded. "Here come Lorenzo's grooms with our horses."

We accepted our mounts and rode away side by side.

"Now," said Guaracco, as we entered a dim street, lighted only by the lanterns of a watch patrol, "you will remember that I showed you a pearl, a beautiful jewel? And it put you to sleep?"

"You mean that in my trance I remembered . . ."

I could see how possible that was. Meanwhile, I braced my spirit lest he try some other occult trick. But he only nodded as if to check the point.

"I learned things about your sci-

ence which you yourself cannot grasp when awake. You shall look into the pearl again, Leo, and more knowledge will creep forth. We shall produce wonders for Lorenzo, winning great favor and possessions, and also build your time reflector. Nay our time reflector—for perhaps I shall make the journey through the ages with you."

He was swaying me very strongly but still I resented his absorbing mastery of every situation. He seemed to read my mind.

"Let us not be lord and servant any more," he offered, "but colleagues and friends. Lorenzo is disposed to grant us money for a shop of our own. Stay on with Verrocchio lest others become suspicious. But your spare time can be applied to our own profit." His voice became sly. "Lisa asks after you, lad. She would be pleased to see you again. And, for all your last words to her. I think you would be pleased, too. Is it not so?"

Finally I agreed to a truce and a partnership. After all it was the only way to escape from the Renaissance. And Guaracco's concessions seemed handsome at the time.

ON THE following day I skimmed my work with Verrocchio, and called on Guaracco at the little house where once he had tried to bestow Lisa upon me. Lisa was there, shy but apparently glad to see me. How had I been able to admire Simonetta Vespucci so greatly, only twelve hours before, I could not understand. But I did my best to conceal my feelings. Guaracco must not bring that influence to bear upon me a second time.

As at his house in the country, Guaracco had fitted up the cellar for laboratory and workshop. At once we began work on the "explosive shot" which Lorenzo had demanded.

At my recommendation we made it cylindrical instead of round, a good eighteen inches long and six

in diameter. Bronze, being light, strong and workable, was our choice for the outer shell of this bomb and I cut deep cross-lines in the outer surface so that it might the more easily explode and fly in pieces. The inside we filled strategically with lumps of lead, with spaces between for powder.

Guaracco, though helpful, was as puzzled as Giuliano de Medici about the delay in explosion. To be certain of that delay, I mixed a slow-burning powder, with charcoal of willow wood only lightly burnt. The completed mixture was no more than dark brown in color, and a noticeable interval of time was needed for its ignition. Of this slow-burning powder I made a fuse or match, which led through a hole in the rear part of the bomb.

"The discharge from the cannon will ignite the match," I explained, "and the explosion will come in as short a space as you would take to say an *Ave Maria*."

"Say an *Ave Maria* for the souls of those it strikes." Guaracco laughed with cruel relish.

We also made a more elaborate bomb, its curved sides pierced with muzzles from which bullets could be thrown by the explosion. When both were finished—we took only a morning and an afternoon—Guaracco recommended that we wait before presenting them to Lorenzo.

"I take a parable from the construction itself," he admonished me. "Delay the explosion of this wonder. It will be the more effective with His Magnificence. Remember also that when you have given him the explosive shot, he will demand at once the flying machine."

That was excellent advice for I was still muddled in my plan to build man-lifting wings and Guaracco could not—or would not—help me.

I therefore went into the trading centers of Florence to shop for materials. My teacher, Andrea del Verrocchio, who had heard little of my

problem, suggested as framework the wood of Spanish yew, which was employed by the archers of England for their superb longbows and was undoubtedly the strongest and lightest wood to be had. I purchased a bundle of such staves, which I thinned and shaped by careful whitening, and procured strong silk cloth for the fabric.

My best model, it seemed to me, would be the wing of a bat. I went so far as to snare and kill several birds—sorrowfully, for I love animals—and, by manipulating their wings and bodies, I found out certain principles of flight. These I demonstrated by small-scale models, to be hung on threads and made to simulate flying by a strong blast of air from a bellows. A new problem added itself to that of the wings—the construction and manipulation of the tail as a rudder. I sketched a design like a fan, which I hoped to control by pressure and motion of the feet.

Guaracco professed a great deal of interest in this work of mine, which took up all my spare time for several days. His interest seemed to partake a little of superior amusement, as though he foresaw failure. But Lisa was kindly and admiring and even helped in the sewing of the fabric, which needed a woman's skill. I joined the ribs of the wings and tail myself, with looped pieces of leather at the junctures and my thread for sewing and binding was new raw silk.

It was late in the summer of 1470—the last of August, I think—when I had the trial of my machine.

For greater privacy we returned to Guaracco's country house, the scene of my first appearance in this age. Guaracco led the way on his fine white stallion—I rode the gray that had belonged to my hapless adversary Gido, which was later given me by Lorenzo.

Lisa had a pretty little mule and two grooms carried the unwieldy

bundles that held my wings and rudder. How and when Guaracco's dwarfs made the journey, I do not know. We left them behind in Florence but they were waiting for us when we dismounted at the country house. Servants like that pleased Guaracco immensely.

AFTER a light noon repast of cold meat, bread and some white wine I went to a shed at the back of the house. Scrambling up, I donned my pinions.

They measured almost thirty feet from tip to tip and were fastened to me with light strong straps under the armpits, around my biceps and between elbow and wrist. There were springy grips for my hands and, by relaxing or applying squeeze-pressure, I could spread or fold the umbrellalike ribs that supported the fabric. The tail was similarly fixed to my legs, which I could straddle to extend the fan or hold close to fold it.

I gazed down to the ground. It seemed a long way off. Beneath me stood Lisa, her face full of apprehensive interest—and at an upper rear window of the house Guaracco thrust his red-bearded head forth to watch.

"Ready," I said to myself. "Go!"

I sprang. As I did so I spread and beat the wings, extended the tail downward to give me direction in soaring. A sickening airy moment. My face turned up into the sunlight. I seemed to feel the world grow small beneath me. Another longer moment with the touch of triumph, another beating thrash of the wings. Then I whirled helplessly in the air and fell.

I suppose I was stunned. There was a galvanizing shock and darkness, then, from far away, laughter—the delighted laughter of Guaracco. Blending with it came a second voice, softer, gentler. Lisa was patting a prayer for my safety.

Struggling with my close-clamped eyelids, I managed to gaze up. Lisa's face was close above mine, all white

except for the dark worried eyes. She had taken my head in her lap. "You are not dead, Leo?" she asked.

"Not I," I assured her and sat up. It was difficult, for I was bruised in all my limbs and the laboriously-fashioned wings and rudder were broken to bits.

Guaracco descended from his post at the window and came out into the yard. "Not Icarus himself plunged so tragically from heaven," he jibed.

I rose to my feet, unstrapping the tangled wreckage. "For a moment I flew," I defended myself. "The next time—"

"Must there be a next time?" interposed Lisa, who still trembled. "Pray heaven you do not seek to fly again."

"She pleads most prettily," Guaracco observed, stroking his beard. "Are you not content to remain on the ground with her, Leo? Will you not leave flight to the birds, its proper masters?"

But I shook my head stubbornly. "Not I. A bird is no more than an instrument, working according to mathematical law. It is within the capacity of man to duplicate that instrument and its working. I shall try again and I shall succeed."

"See that I am present to watch," said Guaracco, chuckling.

But he was more helpful when, in the house, I stripped off my doublet and showed bruised ribs and shoulders. His many skills included that of mixing salves and ointments and the sticky stuff he applied to my hurts helped them swiftly and greatly.

In any case we had the bombs to offer Lorenzo.

CHAPTER XI

HOPES OF ESCAPE

BOMBS were a curiosity but ours pleased Lorenzo greatly when Guaracco and I returned to Florence with them. He gave us an audience, and later entertainment on the terrace of his villa in the pleasant green suburb of Fiesole.

"These things would do us credit in any battle," he was gracious enough to say. "Yet it is my hope to profit by some more peaceable marvel of yours. What, for example, of that flying machine?"

"I make progress."

I attempted to put him off and Guaracco also labored to change the subject. We discussed the summer heat and the threatened drying up of wells.

"May it please Your Magnificence," I made bold to say, "an irrigation plan might be drawn up. The waters of the Arno could supply the town in driest season and water the fields as well."

"That would benefit the people of my beautiful Florence," said the despot, with one of his softening smiles at play on that arrestingly ugly face.

"Again," I pursued, "does it not seem well to widen the streets of the town? A street should be as wide as the houses are high."

"Make haste slowly," he bade me. "Finish the flying machine before you turn Florence into a paradise."

But an early autumn with real Tuscany frost enabled me to ask for time and a brighter day. As winter came on I lived in Florence, working under Verrocchio at paintings, statues, metalwork and my own devices. In the evenings I had plenty of diversion, for the artist Sandro Botticelli showed himself willing to become my

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I was often entertained at great mansions. One or two times I was present at informal dinners and discussions at Lorenzo's palace and once at the house of Simonetta Vespucci herself. There I met her kinsman, Amerigo Vespucci, who had won fame as a geographer and map-maker. Visiting him was a tall roan-haired young man from Genoa, a sailor and adventurer.

"Cristoforo Colombo." Vespucci introduced him to Botticelli and myself as we stood warming ourselves before an open fire of aromatic wood.

"Colombo?" I repeated. The name did things to my maddeningly distorted recollections. "Colombo? Hark you, sir, you intend to follow the sea for all your days?"

The roan-haired visitor nodded and smiled. "Aye, that. I have visited the infidel princes to the east and Spain and even England. I hope to go further some day."

"Go further?" I exclaimed excitedly. "I should think you will go further!" In my earnestness I laid a hand on his shoulder. "Ser Cristoforo," I said, "much of the world remains unclaimed, undreamed of. There are whole continents besides these we know—whole oceans and shoals of islands. It is fated for you to sail westward, to find a new world!"

"How, a new world?" he asked me, a little puzzled.

"This earth is round," I informed him weightily. "It is shaped like a ball with oceans and lands at every quarter of it. In circumference it is nearly twenty-five thousand miles."

HE BURST into laughter at that, laughter so hearty that Botticelli and some others looked up to see the reason.

"I see it now, Ser Leo!" cried Cristoforo Colombo. "You have been reading that strange book by the Englishman."

"What strange book?" I demanded, puzzled in my turn.

"John Mandeville was the Englishman's name and he wrote his tale of wondrous travels a good hundred years ago. I bethink me he even said that the circumference of the Earth is something near your measurement, above twenty thousand English miles.* But to my mind it is smaller than that, with India's most eastern spice islands not too many days' sailing out from the Azores."

"You tell us nothing new, young sir," Amerigo Vespucci said to me. "Surely only the simple country folk think that Earth is other than round and without end. The journey of the Sun and stars, the dropping down of a vessel's hull at the line of sky and sea, these prove the roundness of the Earth."

"And so I might have demonstrated by a voyage had some prince given me ships," rejoined Colombo wistfully.

I could not help but assure him that this gift would come to him in the year 1492 from the ruler of Spain.

"By your leave, my friend, I shall wait until that happy day dawns," he said with a bow.

That incident cured me of making prophecies.

Yet I was successful in fashioning many devices, which served to appease Lorenzo, though I was so long in perfecting my flying machine. The most popular, to peasants and porters as well as to my companions in higher social scale, was the wheelbarrow.

As to my studies in art I was able to contribute many suggestions which Verrocchio accepted gratefully, among them the rather obvious one that a painter or sculptor of the living figure should study

* "The Travels of Sir John Mandeville, Knight," existed in manuscript form as early as 1371. The theory of Earth's roundness, common among intelligent geographers in the fifteenth century, is set out at length by Mandeville, who describes a reputed voyage nearly around the world in his own time.

anatomy. Such study was most difficult in Florence, for religious law frowned upon the godless cutting up of bodies that should have Christian burial.

However, Lorenzo once again showed himself ready to assist me and I was enabled to visit the morgue, to study and even dissect bodies of paupers. Some of my sketches Verrocchio posted on the walls of his *bottega* as ideal studies, and we also assembled on a pedestal the complete skeleton of a horse, to be observed in making equestrian paintings and studies.

At the end of winter, Lorenzo entertained Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the duke of Milan, in lavish manner. Andrea del Verrocchio was pageant master during those glittering days and I helped him to plan processions of horsemen and costumed figures, routs, balls, receptions and miracle plays, even a warlike afternoon of jousting in one of the public squares.

Here banks of seats were erected all around a cleared space, so that the square resembled a stadium or hippodrome, and various Florentine cavaliers tilted against the followers of the Milanese ruler. Lorenzo offered, in what he must have thought a kindly mood, to provide me with armor, a lance and a warhorse, that I might take part in the activity. When I declined he thought I was being only modest.

"You are an artist and scientist," he argued, "and therefore, among free Florentines at least, a gentleman and the peer of any. Do not be afraid of lords with their lances."

But I managed to beg off, though the sport was not as dangerous as I had surmised. For one thing, the opposing cavaliers did not dash full upon each other. They rode on opposite sides of a paling, endeavoring to strike or push across it with lance-point against shield or helmet.

For another thing professional soldiers were barred, as apt to forget themselves. Giuliano de' Medici,

handsome and dashing, wore a knot of ribbon tied upon his mail-clad arm by the beautiful Simonetta and overthrew two opponents. Otherwise the jousting struck me as rather tame.

LORENZO took special pride in showing his art treasures to Sforza, who, as Poliziano later told me, cried out that mere gold and silver could not approximate such riches of the soul. And when the Milanese departed they were too greatly impressed to bide their admiration—which was what Lorenzo had hoped.

It had been Guaraccio's earnest ambition to make a friend of Galeazzo Sforza but after a carefully contrived interview on the final day of the visit he sought me out at Verrocchio's *bottega*, shaking his head.

"Sforza is too absolute a tyrant among his Milanese," he complained.

"Is money not something?" I suggested tensingly, for in those days we were on terms of something resembling good fellowship.

He shook his foxy red head. "Money is little to me—I want power. I want wills to be bowed to mine, cities to rise or fall at my lifted hand, great men to go on missions here and there with my words and wishes upon their lips. I want the oceans to shake with the passage of my ships, the continents to vibrate under the marching feet of my armies. I want to rule!"

"Money rules," I reminded. "Look at Lorenzo. The founder of his house was a druggist, a simple maker of pills. Yet, by the accumulation and wise use of gold—"

"Gold!" snorted Guaraccio. "It buys food, clothes, women, wine, music—but of what value is it, save to attract thieves? It was powerful with the Medici only through generations of careful planning and I cannot wait so long. Cold steel is the better metal if held by a brave man and ruled by a wise one."

I BEGAN to appreciate something of the ambition that stirred this charlatan-genius.

"I followed sorcery from boyhood," Guaracco went on, "because, at first, I believed in it. As you yourself once put it, a true sorcerer could travel winds, chain lightnings, know and rule the Universe. Even when I found that supposed enchantments were but a fraud I remained a student and practitioner of the false art—and I have won some rewards.

"You saw my coven of deluded witch-worshippers. They serve me in many ways—through fear or awe or fascination—that they would never dare if I offered them only gold. Too, a great many nobles and merchants respect and fear me because I seem to foretell events, can cast horoscopes and apparently summon devils. One or two are well within my power. I gave a certain man poison, for instance, to serve a certain other man. That certain other man owes me both gratitude for the vengeance and fear lest I betray him."

"But now you follow true science," I said. "You told me so."

"Science—and sorcery of a kind."

I shook my head. "There is no such thing as sorcery."

"Is there not? Come with me."

Once again I accompanied him to his house nearby. The front room was changed in that there was a massive square table with a thick velvet covering extending to the floor on all sides. In its center stood a great bowl of silvercoated glass.

Guaracco drew the heavy curtains, so that it was quite dark in the room, and lighted a candle. Then, at the clap of his hands, the two dwarfs entered with a great ewer of water between them. From this Guaracco filled the bowl to the brim.

"Look into it, Leo," he bade me, as the dwarfs departed.

I did so. "What then?" I challenged him. "Here is a simple basin of water."

"You are sure of that?" he persisted. "Thrust in your hands and convince yourself."

Again I obeyed him. It was water, sure enough, and beneath it the surface of the bowl was smooth and normal.

"I see no wonder," I said to Guaracco.

"What did you expect to find in that bowl—the face of Lisa?" He laughed. "Favor me, kinsman, by blowing out the candle."

I blew it out. The room fell dark all at once. No, not entirely, for a faint filtered glow came up from the bowl of water.

"A chemical trick," I pronounced immediately. "You have put phosphorus in there."

"Did you not see the water poured from pitchers?" he asked. "But I make no argument. Look into the bowl again."

As he spoke he put in his own hand and stirred the liquid into ripples. I saw nothing but a disturbed surface, like a tiny ocean in a gale, with light beneath. Then the ripples grew less, slowed, finally departed. I gazed deep into the radiant water.

From its bottom a face looked up at me.

Lisa!

I think I spoke her name aloud and put forth a hand to touch her forehead. But my finger only dipped into water and Guaracco laughed his familiar mocking peal.

"You were deceived for all your assurance," he taunted me. Quickly he moved to uncurtain the windows, letting in light. "See, it was simple. I arranged it an hour ago to mystify one of the Milanese. A hole in the table, a glass bottom in the bowl—and under the velvet a couch whereon Lisa lay with a light close beside her—"

He lifted a corner of the cloth and Lisa slowly emerged.

"It was as if you looked upon her through a window," Guaracco

summed up. He saw that I gazed reproachfully at the girl and laughed once again.

"Nay, Leo, she did not deceive you of herself. I put her to sleep as you know I can do—with this."

He held it up in his fingers—the glowing pearl that more than once before had drawn forth my wits. Staring at it unguardedly I felt myself ensnared before I could set up my defense. He caught my elbow with his other hand, easing me into a chair as mists closed about me.

When I awoke Guaracco sat at the velvet-covered table, scribbling hastily upon a tablet of white paper.

"You will rejoice," he said, seeing my eyes open. "I took opportunity to open again that closed memory of yours."

"What time?"

"Details of the machine you forgot. The time reflector."

At once I lost my resentment of his sly assertion of power of my senses. "Full details?" I cried.

"Enough, I think, to build the machine itself."

And then I saw Lisa's eyes, turned mournfully upon me, as though already she bade me goodbye.

CHAPTER XII

THE NEW REFLECTOR

EVEN if I could I do not think I would set down exact details of a machine so apt to cause trouble as the one Guaracco had retrieved in theory from the waste places of my mind. The fact is, he kept the plans to himself and questioned me only now and then, sometimes hypnotizing me for the questions, sometimes not. And there were hits of science which even he could not digest.

"These exact measurements of the steel frame parts—how can we achieve them?" he would ask. "You

tell me in your sleep of micrometers, yet how can we design a micrometer? How even knowing its principle can we make it without proper tools? How was the first micrometer made?"

Automatic lathes, alloy charts and welding torches were equally unobtainable. Guaracco did the next best thing. He sought out a master swordsmith and in some adroit way—I think his witch-cult helped him—bound the fellow to his service by terror and awe. This craftsman, with all his tools and materials, he transported to the country estate and there set him to work painstakingly shaping the metal skeleton of the reflector mechanism.

Electrical engineering Guaracco learned from the ground up. Here once again I must needs be hypnotized and my subconscious mind probed. My partner began with sticks of sealing wax and glass rods, rubbing them with fur or silk and studying the effects of the static charges.

From that he progressed to what I was able to remember as a Leyden jar, contrived by his own cunning hands after several unsuccessful trials. Finally came simple batteries but here he kept back from me the knowledge he had mined from my own inhibited memory. He refused to tell me the acids and metals involved.

When I insisted interruption came—a messenger from Lorenzo, asking how I progressed with the flying machine.

"You reminded him," I accused Guaracco in private.

"How ungrateful you are, Leo!" He snickered unabashedly, fingering his red beard. "Go to Florence and make your report. I shall work here in our laboratory and promise you that I will have progress to show when you return."

To Florence, perforce, I went. Lorenzo received me with some impatience in his frescoed audience

chamber at the palace.

"Well, young sir, what of the wings you were making?" he demanded. "I gave you and Guaracco money for your experiments and it is high time you made me some return."

I exhibited my small models, all that I had to show since the breaking of my first wings. He was interested but not completely satisfied and I regretted having mentioned aviation to him. Yet I knew men could fly. I remembered seeing them in that age whence I came and which itself was yet to come—men flying singly or in parties with the aid of great spread-winged contrivances.

Meanwhile, Lorenzo was giving me orders. "I shall see this device take shape under my own eyes. At my villa in Fiesole is a great guest house. Go you thither, set up your shop and have sent to you all that you need. Work where I can watch."

I bowed acceptance, and went to Fiesole. There messengers brought me the remains of my wings and rudder, also more leather, silk and staves, while Lisa came at my urgent plea to help with the sewing. She made a considerable impression on the various guests who thronged Lorenzo's villa.

Botticelli wanted to paint her. Poliziano wrote six sonnets about her, Giuliano spoke so gallantly to her that Simonetta's eyes took on a green glow. To a certain captain of mercenaries, a Spaniard named Hernando Villareal, I was even forced to voice a warning.

"The young lady is working on my machine," I told him, "at my wish and under my protection. She does not welcome your pressing attentions."

"By God's blood!" he sneered. We were walking in a grove of poplars to which I had drawn him for privacy. "I think, *Ser Leo*, that it is you who finds the situation unwelcome."

"I do not like it either if that will

content you."

He caressed his long moustache of black silk. "Nay, it does not content me a whit. I shall say to her whatever I please whenever I please."

"Few words are best," I made reply. "If you speak to her again I shall deprive your company of its captain." And I turned and walked away.

He was in a towering rage and made haste in search of a friend to bear me a formal defiance. The first he met was Giuliano, who had not forgotten the cudgeling I had given him and the friendship he had sworn. Giuliano informed the Spaniard that I was the most dangerous antagonist in Christendom, in whose hands a wand was worse than a sword and a sword itself a finger of Fate. Whereat Captain Hernando Villareal left Fiesole the same day, indeed left Florence and I never heard speak of him again.

WHEN my wings were completely repaired and improved I made a second attempt, springing from the eaves of the guest house while Lorenzo and his friends watched. Again I failed badly, tumbling aslant through the air—but this time I managed to land upright on my feet, only spraining my ankle. My wings and other harness remained undamaged and I was not distressed by Guaracco's ironic laughter.

"I count myself lucky," I said and Giuliano ran out to support my limping steps. "My ankle will mend of itself. But my wings, being broken, would take much more labor and time."

"You have not a complete loss of labor to show," Lorenzo was considerate enough to say. "You came to ground a good ten paces beyond the house, farther than you might have leaped unaided."

"And had you leaped without wings you would have hurt worse than your ankle," added Giuliano, though he had first disputed my

theory of man's ability to fly. "For those two moments you were above ground, methought I saw your fabric hold you aloft. It fully broke your fall at least."

This encouragement heartened me. "I shall yet succeed," I made bold to say while a physician plucked the shoe from my injured foot. "It is not the fault of my theory, nor the weakness of my arms. I must learn as a fledgling bird learns."

But my sprained ankle kept me for days at Fiesole, where I could practise no art save lute playing and repartee among those silken courtiers. Lisa insisted on remaining with me, most prettily concerned over my injury. After a day or so Guaracco appeared with some of his healing salves, to care for me with the apparent solicitude of a kinsman, to bow and utter compliments to the ladies, to discuss poetry with Poliziano, weapons with Giuliano, science and government with Lorenzo.

"I submit that my young Cousin Leo makes progress with his flying," he told the company. "Who can hold these first failures against him? Can he learn as a science in a few days the behavior that has been a born instinct of birds since the Creation?"

With more such talk Guaracco helped to convince Lorenzo that I should continue my labors in the field of aviation. I came to realize it was to Guaracco's interest that I do so. He wanted me to stay out of his way. He was carefully arranging that I not relearn too much of the science I remembered only when in trance.

The rest of that summer I was able to put off a third experiment with my wings—not that I did not want to fly but I dreaded falling and falling again before the eyes of my patron. During the winter I achieved several substitute offerings.

These included a plan for draining some nearby swamps, which Lorenzo approved but did not act upon at once—a brief written outline of

a new system of swordplay for the palace guardsmen, which Lorenzo in high good humor caused me to demonstrate upon two very surprised and glum fencing-masters—and a suggestion, rather vague, about the use and purpose of antiseptics, at which Lorenzo laughed and which I could not demonstrate at all.

I made several attempts at fashioning both a microscope and a telescope but I did not understand the accurate grinding of lenses and nobody was skillful enough to show me. Also, even when I secured from Andrea del Verrocchio's spectacle maker a pair of indifferent lenses that would serve, I could not bring them into proper relationship in a tube.

One thing I remembered well from my century, or rather from the one before it, was Mark Twain's pleasant novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. I was failing signally to duplicate the exploits of that hard-headed and blithe hero. Perhaps the Yankee, being an adroit and impassioned mechanic, knew the principles of all things from the ground up.

My science, first of all, had been sketchy and too derived. Second, I had been too interested in art, so art had been set above my less-loved studies in chemistry, engineering and physics and they had been shoved too far back in that now-clouded brain of mine. Without Guaracco's hypnotism hardly anything of real complex practicality could be evoked. And with Guaracco's hypnotism I was unable to see or appreciate the very things I was caused to remember.

Poor Andrea del Verrocchio, who had hoped for so much from my drawing, dared to shake his untidy head over these scientific gropings of mine.

"His Magnificence will ruin a master painter to make a convenient philosopher," he mourned. And it

was true that I had little or no opportunity that winter to paint the picture I had once visioned as my footprint in the sands of Renaissance time.

As for the time reflector, which Guaracco worked on with phenomenal energy and understanding, it took form and power as the cold weather passed us by. Among the things it lacked was a piece of alum large enough to make a lens but the most notable alum mines of our knowledge were not far away—fifty miles to the southwest in the ancient town of Volterra.

At that time, however, the Volterrans chose to refuse any trade or tribute to Lorenzo—even to defy him. It began to look as if the only alum we could get must be secured by theft or force.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FATE OF VOLTERRA

HERE was, indeed, what seemed a full stop to our hopes for completing the mechanism. I could think of nowhere to get alum in a large enough portion but in a mine. True, crystals may be built or fed but I did not know how—and the only available mine was at Volterra.

That defiant city was a small one but plucky and proud with splendid defences. As I mused, into my mind drifted a few lines of a poem I had heard often in my other existence:

... lordly Volterra
Where stands the far-famed hold,
Piled high by hands of giants
For god-like kings of old.*

Whether Volterra's defenses were giant-built and God-begun I cannot say—but they were tremendously old and strong, walls of rough-cut

stone that were said to go back to ancient Etruscan times. The city thus enclosed stood upon a huge olive-clad height, from which the sea was visible a score of miles distant. Near at hand opened the dark mouths of the alum mines which were so suddenly forbidden to us. In fact the Volterrans forcibly ejected certain Florentine commissioners who claimed a tribute for Lorenzo.

His Magnificence undoubtedly meant what he had once told me about wishing to avoid war as costly, dangerous and ignoble. But this was too loud a challenge for even his considerable patience. In the spring of 1472 he called a meeting of the Signoria—the lot-chosen body of citizens who acted as public council—for discussion of the problem. It so happened that Guaracco himself, a Florentine resident by virtue of that house near Verrocchio's *bottega*, was a member of this jury-like group of governors and was present at the meeting.

I too would have liked to attend but it was impossible. Lorenzo had called for a secret session—proof of his concern over the matter. All I knew was that one of the Signoria, a conservative old fellow by the name of Tomasco Soderino, was intending to speak strongly for conciliation and peace. Perhaps he could restore friendship with the Volterrans, make it possible for me to secure my alum.

I wished Lisa were there to talk serenely and pleasantly to me. But with Guaracco's permission she was visiting a friend, the abbess of a convent near Venice.

The meeting lasted all morning and all afternoon—and at the end of it Guaracco came to seek me at Verrocchio's. "It is all settled," he informed me, grinning triumphantly.

"Settled?" I repeated. "Peace, you mean?"

"War," he replied. "We take your

*These lines are from "Sonnet at the Bridge," by Thomas Babington Macaulay. The alum mines referred to are still workable.

needful alum by force."

I felt a little shocked. "But Soderino was going to—"

"Aye, and he did," Guaracco anticipated the end of the sentence. "Bleated about soft answers to turn away Volterran wrath, bleated for hours. I had an answer ready. I told Lorenzo that we could not make your flying machine without alum and plenty of it."

"Alum is not for the flying machine," I protested, "but for the time reflector."

He gestured idly with a big hand. "Do you not think I know, boy? But we need alum and what matter under which pretext we get it? Lorenzo is obsessed with desire to see men fly. My word was the final ounce in the balance to make him decide for war."

After that things moved fast in Florence because word arrived that the town of Volterra had employed a round thousand tough mercenaries to defend her ancient walls. Lorenzo immediately gathered four times that number of troops and as their commander engaged Federigo d'Urbino, one of the most noteworthy soldiers of the Italian peninsula.*

He did not deign to take command himself and forcibly restrained the younger and more fiery Giuliano from volunteering to lead the mounted lancers. But the brothers did lead the force in procession through the chief streets of the city.

TO ME that glittering spectacle was somehow ironic. The cavalry was for the most part French and Navarrese, the pike-trailing infantry largely Swiss and Swabian, the crossbow companies from Sicily, the artillery and siege train Spanish. The whole cosmopolitan host was

sprinkled here and there with Scots, Hungarians, Englishmen and Moors.

If any element was missing it was Florentine.

Yet that was the way the city-states of Italy fought—not with their own blood but with professional adventurers. Perhaps something can be said for the system. Battles lacked the extreme ferocity of deadly enmity, for opposing generals were often old friends and comrades in arms, willing to win or lose, so to speak, on points. At any rate the Florentine shopkeepers and artisans seemed pleased and cheered those foreign soldiers as loudly as though a force of native Tuscans was marching away to war.

Guaracco, as leader of the party that advocated strife, went to the palace for permission to accompany the mercenaries. I was with him as he found Lorenzo, writing busily at his desk in the audience chamber.

"Go if you will," the ruler told Guaracco without raising his eyes from the page. "I trust that this campaign is final."

"You mean, destruction of Volterra?" prompted Guaracco like a lawyer wrenching an admission from a witness.

Lorenzo seemed to hear him only by half. "That physician is often most cruel," he murmured as he resumed writing what looked to be a verse, perhaps a sonnet, "who appears most compassionate."

To this moment I am sure that what he said was being fitted into his poem and had nothing to do with the campaign. Even if I am wrong it was a most equivocal answer. But Guaracco bowed as though he had received specific and welcome orders. Then he hurried away.

Perhaps I should have gone with him then but I had no stomach for battle. I felt some uneasy guilt because, with Federigo d'Urbino's train of siege ordnance, went my multiple-cannon arrangement for battering down walls and many of

* This famous general of mercenaries later commanded an army that fought against Lorenzo. War, to these soldiers of fortune, was a game and a business. There was no more lasting enmity between such mercenaries than there is today between lawyers who may have opposed each other in lawsuits.

the crossbowmen carried weapons with Guaracco's lever improvement which I had clarified in a sketch.

A day I lingered in the town, which buzzed with excitement about the campaign. A whole night I lay wakeful in the cell-like room I still kept at Verrocchio's *bottega*. Something indefinable made me woefully nervous. Dawn had barely become bright before I dressed, drew on thigh-boots and leather riding-coat, girded myself with a sword and hurried to where my gray horse was stabled.

It was as if a voice called me to Volterra.

Yet for all my strangely-risen anxiety I could not ride my poor horse to death. I did no more than thirty-five miles the first day, stopping the night at a peasant's hut. When in the morning I continued, before I had ridden an hour, I met another horseman, galloping in the direction of Florence. He was a half-armored French lancer with the velvet-edged sleeves of an under officer. Also he was three-quarters drunk and waved a grubby wine bottle at me.

"Way! Way!" he bawled. "I bear messages to Lorenzo!"

But I spurred forward and managed to seize his hridle. "Tell me," I said earnestly. "How goes the fighting at Volterra?"

He started to laugh, and finished by hiccoughing. "Fighting?" he echoed scornfully. "There was no fighting."

"How's that?" I persisted.

"We marched under the walls of the town and bade them surrender. And"—he broke off to swig wine—"and they did!" More gulping laughter over something he deemed a joke. "Now let me ride on with my dispatches, young sir."

"One word more," I begged but he struck at me with the bottle.

It was of stone, and heavy, but I flung up my forearm to save my head and sustained only a musty

drenching. With a prick of the spur I forced my gray horse close against his mount, shifting my hand from his bridle to his collar, and with the other hand I wrenched the bottle away from him.

"Why is the army not returning?" I demanded and shook him hard.

He lost his fierceness but not his joy over what had happened.

"You cannot guess?" he flung back, with a soldier's contempt for one who does not understand military routine. "The lads are plundering. What else? So should I be plundering if—"

I pushed the wine bottle back into his fist and let him go. With whip and spur I sped on my way. But when I arrived I was too late, even if I had had the power and knowledge to divert that misdeed.

VOLTERRA gushed flame from within her walls. Around the town capered the victorious troops, some of them drunker than the courier I had met, others staggering under burdens of loot. Even from afar I heard yells and laughter. The camp, a great field of tents beneath the hill that supported the town, was to the eye almost deserted and into it I spurred. By chance I came almost immediately to the commander's pavilion and there I found Federigo d'Urbino, sitting alone.

He slouched forward on his folding chair, his long black-tufted chin clutched in a hard hand. His face was as somber as his armor was bright. He glared up as I swung out of the saddle.

"You come with dispatches from Florence, I make no doubt," he growled. "Ride back and tell that blood-drinker, Lorenzo, that I will never draw sword for him again, not if he seek to buy me with all the treasure of Croesus."

"What is this drivell?" I snapped back. "Is not this atrocity your bidding?" In my revulsion I forgot that I was calling to account the

foremost soldier of the peninsula. But he only shook his head.

"Not my bidding—Lorenzo's. I have a reputation as a gentleman and a merciful Christian."

"To be sure it was Lorenzo's bidding," said a voice behind me, a voice that often had a way of breaking in on conversations. "You, my dear young Cousin, beard Lorenzo speak to me, give me a message."

I whirled upon Guaracco, thrusting my angry face into his. "You dared order this pillage and destruction as though you were Lorenzo's agent?"

"Aye, that I did," he admitted with the utmost good cheer. "You can bear me witness before Ser Federigo. His Magnificence was plain—'That physician is often most cruel—'"

"So you interpreted his thoughtless speech, you murdering dog!" I almost choked and out of my scabbard I swept my blade. "Draw before I cut you down and rid Earth of your eternal devilry!"

The red beard rustled in his old smile of mockery. "I have no sword, Leo," he said as though in chiding reminder. "I bear only—this."

From under the fringe of his mantle his hand stole into view, with his self-invented pistol ready cocked. Even at that, I might have fallen upon him and forced him to shoot, perhaps killing me, but Federigo d'Urbino, who did not recognize that deadly little weapon for what it was, sprang up and caught my arm.

"Do not add one more murder to this massacre, young sir," he begged me. "It is possible that Ser Guaracco truly misunderstood. Yet—" He turned away. "Somehow I must stop these fiends at their hell's work."

Left alone with me Guaracco stepped warily out of my reach, pistol still leveled. "It is true that I urged Lorenzo's words upon the army and it was none too loath to sack the town. I have even taken a piece of loot myself. Come and see."

At some time during that speech he had brought his other hand into view. Something gleamed softly and slyly between thumb and finger—his great lustrous pearl, full of spells.

I fought against its power as against a crushing weight and indeed I did not lose my wits. But I grew tremulous and vague of thought and let him coax me to sheathe my sword.

"Come and see," he repeated and I went with him, slowly and a little drunkenly, to a tent not far from the commander's.

And there he showed me what he had seized from some Volterranean shop or warehouse. A great soapy block of alum, reflecting subdued gray and blue lights, lay upon a length of canvas. It was almost exactly cubical and a good yard along the edge.

"I knew that I must get hold of this piece," Guaracco told me, "and so I passed on Lorenzo's orders. You must not blame me, Leo, if I show scientific zeal."

Some worse motive had really caused him to start the cruelties but I gazed at the greasy-looking crystal and its light seemed to drive out some of his spell. In it I saw even a gleam of hope. It would help me to a completion of the time reflector. Then I would be quit of the Renaissance, its frustrations and fantasies. Above all, I would be quit of the abominable Guaracco.

CHAPTER XIV

ALMOST

NOW if ever can I offer proof that this is not fiction. If it were and I were the hero, I would have tried to slaughter Guaracco there in the camp before sacked Volterra despite his triumphant exhibition of the mammoth alum-crystal, despite his

ready explanations, despite the pistol he kept ready in his hand. That would have been the honorable, the courageous, the dramatic course.

But it happens that the story is true and that I was and am of human clay. For two years Guaracco had alternately intimidated and cajoled me with judicious applications of hypnotic influence. My ultimate emotion was only one of hopeful relief. If this be shameful so be it.

We left the camp together, almost like friends, with some peasant attendants and a two-wheeled cart to carry the piece of alum. We did not go directly to Florence but sought a rather rough road that took us around and then to Guaracco's house. There we placed the alum, with infinite care and numerous helping hands, in the cellar workshop.

Guaracco assuredly knew more about grinding lenses than I did. Probably it was one more twentieth-century science he had developed from his hypnotic interviews with my subconscious self. Too, the alum was a larger and softer piece of raw material than the fragments of glass I had worked with. In one day he roughed it into shape and in two more, with the help of the swordsmith, he made of it a perfect double-convex lens.

This, two feet in diameter, was a gray-gleaming discus that dealt weirdly with light.

AT LENGTH the time came for the machine to be assembled. We took our place in the same upstairs chamber from which, in that twentieth century which would now reclaim me, I had vanished—the same where my friend Astley waited at my direction, prepared for my return.

I helped to bolt the rods into a framework and lifted into place Guaracco's battery, a massive but adequate thing inside a bronze case worked over in strange bas-reliefs.

I think that case came from the

Orient. It was to do the work I had done with many smaller batteries in my first reflector. Into sockets were fitted his electric light globes, most cunningly wrought—again by Guaracco, in secret.

"They are not the best," he said. "I understand"—and he smiled wispily, as always when he referred to his findings through hypnosis—"that an element called vanadium is the best for the filaments inside."

"It is more than the best—it is necessary," I pronounced. That much stuck in my mind.

He shook his head. "I have used manganese. That, I have come to believe"—again his wispily smile—"is almost as good. Obtainable too, as vanadium is not." He cocked his lustrous eyes upward. "Did you not once predict, my dear adopted cousin, that a Genoese friend of the Vespucci family—Colombo—would discover a new world in the west?"

"I did."

"And is not vanadium to be mined in those latitudes? . . . Just so. But not elsewhere. We must make this substance serve."

He studied the camera apparatus, slipped the lens of alum into place and secured it with clamps. Then he set the time gauge.

"May first, nineteen thirty-nine," he said aloud. "And so much allowance for the coming change in calendar which you predict. It was on May first, nineteen thirty-nine that your friend was to bring in a carcass from which your structure would be reapproximated, eh?" He straightened up from his tinkering. "Now, Leo, do you wish to say goodbye to Lisa?"

I had not forgotten her. Rather I had fought against thinking too much of this sweet restrained girl whom I had refused as a gift from Guaracco but to whom my heart turned in spite of all. His speaking her name awakened certain resolutions I had made. I left the room immediately.

SHE was lingering in the upper hall just outside the door, dressed in a girdled gown of blue and a bonnetlike headdress. Her dark eyes gleamed with tears—like stars.

"Lisa!" I called her in a voice I could not keep steady. "Lisa, child, I have come to say—to say—"

"Farewell?" she tried to finish for me and her face drooped down into her hands. I could not but catch her in my arms and kiss her wet cheeks.

"Don't cry," I begged her. "Don't, my dear. Listen, while I swear to come back, to hurry back—"

"We shall not meet again," Lisa sobbed.

"I will come back," I insisted. "Since this second machine remains here it will take us eventually into the age from whence I came and then—"

"Us," she repeated, trying to understand.

"I will rescue you from this century and this fantastic world and chain of sorrows," I promised.

Guaracco cleared his throat. We looked up, and moved apart, for his head was thrusting itself around the edge of the door.

"Lisa," he said, "I leave certain preparations in your hands. At this time tomorrow you will bring into the room with a machine a slaughtered calf—"

Turning from the girl, as Guaracco continued to talk I hurried into the room and closed the door behind me. I saw that the power of the machine was turned on, the light gleaming blue-gray through the lens, the misty screen sprung up in the framework. Once passed it was 1939 beyond. . . .

And then I saw that Guaracco was removing the last of his clothes.

"What does this mean?" I demanded of him.

He confronted me, a naked figure of baskety leanness. "I have decided to make the journey through time instead of you."

"But I—" The words broke on

my astonished lips.

"No arguments," said Guaracco. "It is too late." And he sprang into the midst of the framework and through the veil of fog.

For a moment I saw him beyond in the room, as fragile as a man of soap-bubbles, less than a ghost. I gazed, waiting for him to fade away completely. But his substance thickened again, took back its color. I saw the pink of his skin, the red of his beard, the gleam of his abashed eyes. He staggered on the floor as on the deck of a ship. He was still in his own age. The reflector was a failure.

I laughed triumphantly, almost jauntily, and half sprang at him. But he slumped down on a chair, still naked. So much gloom had fallen around and upon him that part of my anger left me. My clenched fists relaxed, my denunciation stuck in my throat. He had tried to trick me, to shove himself into my own age at my expense—but it had not worked. I only paraphrased Robert Burns.

"The best-laid plans of mice and men," I taunted, "go oft astray."

He looked up and stared at me for a full minute—yes, at least sixty seconds—before making any reply.

"I can understand your feelings," he muttered then, as humbly as a child caught in a jam closet. "Once more, I thought, I had tricked my way ahead of you. But I reap the reward of my sinful vanity."

I was amazed. This was nothing like Guaracco. "Do not tell me," I jeered, "that you repent."

His hand wrung the point of his beard. "Is it not permitted the proudest and foulest wrongdoer to say that he has done ill?" His head bowed almost upon his bare scrawny knees. "Leo, let me make my poor excuses. My heart was full of zeal for what I should behold and learn five centuries in the future. It would be to me what heaven is to the true churchman. And now, without even

a glimpse—"

At last he rose. He held out a trembling hand. He seemed suddenly grown old and frail. "Do not laugh or reproach. I have been deceitful but let me make amends. We shall be true scientists and philosophers together. Will you not forgive and take me as your friend?"

I could not exult over so patently broken an adversary and his manner of earnest humility disarmed me. I took his hand. At once he straightened up and his voice and bearing captured some of the old sprightliness.

"That is better, Cousin Leo—for we are kinsmen in taste and direction at least. What wonders shall we not work together! The word will hear of us!"

As he spoke a commotion and the sound of an excited voice came from down below us.

I being dressed, ran down in place of Guaracco.

Botticelli stood facing Lisa. He was mud-spattered and panting as from swift riding and his plump pleasant face was full of grave concern.

"Leo," he said at once, "I risk my career, perhaps my life, in warning you. Fly and at once!"

"At once?" I echoed, scowling amazement. "Why?"

He gestured excitedly. "Do not bandy words, man," he scolded me. "Begone, I say! Lorenzo has signed a writ for your arrest. You are a doomed man."

My mouth fell open it seemed to me, a good twelve inches.

"It is because of what happened at Volterra," Botticelli plunged on. "That town was sacked because of you. Lorenzo wanted alum for your flying machine."

"Ave and I got alum—"

"But you did not make a flying machine with it. Criticism has flamed up over the treatment of the Volterrans and Lorenzo needs a scapegoat. When Guaracco informed

him that you had used it deceitfully for another purpose—"

"Guaracco!" I roared.

I saw his plan now, to usurp my place at the time reflector, leaving me to imprisonment, perhaps death, on a trumped-up charge. I took a step toward the stairs for I wanted that scoundrel's blood.

But Botticelli came hurrying after me and caught my arm. "I hear galloping hoofs, Leo! The officers are coming. Run, I tell you! Run!"

At that moment the door burst open and two officers rushed in.

CHAPTER XV

SANTI PELAGRINI

DELIBERATELY I gazed at the men who had entered so unceremoniously. "You are officers?" I demanded. "You are to arrest me? Where is your warrant?"

"Here it is."

The chief of them drew his sword. I was unarmed, having laid aside even my dagger for the attempt to pass through time. Resistance was useless and I spoke only to save poor Botticelli from possible punishment for riding to warn me.

"You will get no reward after all," I addressed him with simulated spitefulness. "These gentlemen will take me to Lorenzo, not you. It's well for you that they came. Your effort to arrest me might have wound up in your getting hurt. I advise you to stick to paint daubing. Ser. Sandro, and not to play catch-poll again."

He stared at me in pained surprise, then in grateful understanding. I walked out, closely guarded by the patrol, and was mounted upon a spare horse. Then we started—but away from Florence.

"Did not the Magnificent send you to seize me?" I demanded of the

leader. "Take me before him that my case be heard."

They did not reply to that or to other demands. We went southeast mile after mile, leaving the good main road for shorter and rougher stretches. Once again I asked where we were going and what my fate would be and once again I was unanswered. We stopped that night at a little house where a grape grower gave us bread and cheese and wine and subsequently shelter. I slept in front of the fireplace with the men standing watch over me in turn.

By mid-morning of the next day we rode into the seaport of Rimini and straight to the stone wharfs. The leader of our party sent a messenger to call ashore the captain of a small lateen-rigged ship riding close in at anchor. He talked aside with this captain, and gave him an official-looking document. Then I was taken from my horse and led forward.

"Go with this ship master," ordered the chief officer.

I protested loudly and one of the officers gave me a rough shove. Next instant I had knocked him down and the instant after that the others had swarmed upon me, throwing me to the stones of the wharf and pinioning me.

Before I was put into a skiff to go to the vessel irons were procured—broad heavy cuffs, connected by a single link and fastened with coarse locks—and clamped upon my wrists. There was no further sense in resistance. I was rowed out, hoisted to the half-deck and placed in a closet-like compartment off the captain's cabin. We sailed at noon.

The captain did deign to tell me a little of what was to befall. "You are ordered to imprisonment, sir," he said, "at the *Fortaleza degli Santi*

Pelagrini—the Fortress of the Holy Pilgrims."

I had never heard of it and said so.

"It is a great grace and service to heaven," the captain elaborated. "Holy men built it two good centuries gone for an abbey. But the heathen Turk, who flouts true belief and seeks to conquer us all, has taken the coastline, all save this fortress alone. Because we would hold our own, even in the teeth of Islam, it is garrisoned by the Holy Pilgrims."

He told me about the Order of the Holy Pilgrims, as well. They were military monks, not powerful or highborn, like the Templars of the Knights of St. John, but simple monks, armed and trained to fight. As he described them, they had been originally a band of common soldiers who, reaching Jerusalem at the high tide of the Crusades, forsook the world and entered the church. After the ousting of the Christians from the Holy Land they had survived and fought on, and now stubbornly defended the island on which their fortress-priory stood.

AND they were to be my jailers. It did me no good to protest my innocence and my right to justice. Lorenzo's anger, stimulated by the lies of Guaracco, had caused him to doom me thus to imprisonment and forgetfulness without benefit of trial. He or any other ruler of the time was able to do so, putting away a man as easily as he might put away a book or a suit of clothes. I could be thankful that he had not executed me. Or could I?

Five days we sailed before a light breeze, south and slightly eastward over the waters of the Adriatic. I was not permitted to go on deck but there was a latticed port and I saw as quickly as any lookout the two rakish galleys with crescent-blazoned banners that gave us chase on the fifth day.

For awhile it was a close race and

* This Fortress of the Holy Pilgrims must have been located off the coast of Albania, which country was almost entirely overrun by invading Turks during the fifteenth century, though no record of it seems to exist nor any concerning the Order of the Holy Pilgrims.

I thought I might soon exchange my enforced idleness in the little cabin for labor at a galley oar. Then guns spoke to our front, a cheer went up from our sailors and we drew nigh to the defending shores of the island, where stood the fortress of the Holy Pilgrims.

I was allowed on deck at last. I saw the island as a rocky protuberance from the blue ocean, its flattish top green with growth and but a single landing place—an arm of the sea, extending almost to the foot of the great square-towered castle of gray stone that dominated all points of the rock. A boat was put off with myself, the captain and some sailors to row us. I could see, afar off, the sullen Turkish galleys.

WE CAME to the mouth of the inlet and found that it bore two great lumpish towers of masonry, one at either brink, for the stretching of a chain if an enemy were to be held off.* A skiff came forward to meet us, rowed by two tanned shaven-headed men in black serge robes. A third stood upright with his foot on the thwart, a cross-bow in his hands. Its cord was drawn, a bolt ready in the groove.

"Who are you?" he called in a clear challenging voice.

"Christian vessel with a message and a prisoner for you," replied our captain. A jerk of the cross-bowman's shaven skull granted us leave to enter the inlet. I could see that the monks of the fortress wore each a symbol on his breast—a black cross, outlined in white, with a white cockle-shell at the center, emblematic of church and pilgrimage. The two boats rowed inland to a dock of massive mortared stones, where we landed.

One of the monk oarsmen went swiftly ahead with the papers the

captain had brought, while the rest of us mounted more leisurely the paved slope that led to the great gate of the castle. I looked lingeringly upon the outdoors, which I might well be leaving for a term of years if not forever.

There were some goats in a little herd—a series of rock-bordered fields where monks with looped-up gowns were hoeing crops, apparently of beans and barley—an arbor of grapevines. At the few spots where the steep shores relented enough to allow one to reach the seaside, parties of fishermen seined for sardines or speared for mullet.

The big gateway of colossal timbers, fastened with ancient copper bolts, stood open and allowed us to pass through a courtyard. Inside stood a row of black-robed men, armed with spears, apparently taking part in a most unpriestly military drill. They were all tanned, lean, and hard-faced and handled their nikes with the precision and discipline of trained soldiers, which indeed they were. Into the castle hall we went, then down a corridor to a plain windowless cell, lighted by a candle.

"Father Augustine!" respectfully called the monk who had conducted us.

Someone moved from behind the plain table of deal planks and stood up to greet us. He was a gaunt fierce man, who wore a robe and symbol in no way differing from the others, yet I knew at once that here was the master of the priory.

His shoulders rose high and broad, so that he seemed a great black capital Y of a man, and his face, dark as a Moor's, was seamed and cross-hatched with scars. His nose had been smashed flat by some heavy blow, the right corner of his mouth was so notched that a tooth gleamed through and his left eyelid lay flat over an empty socket. The sole remaining eye quessed over us with stern appraisal.

* This chain defense for a harbor or landing was long a favorite with fortresses. As late as the American Revolutionary War the British were prevented from coming up the Hudson by a chain stretched across at West Point.

THE monk stood at attention, and offered the letter that the captain had brought. Father Augustine opened and read it quickly, then spoke in the deep voice of practised command.

"Go, Brother Pietro, and fetch Giacopo the clerk. He shall write to Lorenzo de Medici that this prisoner will be held here as he desires."

The monk made a gesture similar to a salute, and departed as briskly as a well trained orderly. Father Augustine faced the captain. "Will you partake of our humble hospitality, my son?"

"Gladly, Holy Father," was the captain's reply. "I dare not leave my anchorage under your guns until yonder dog galleys of Mahound depart in any case."

The notched mouth spread in a smile. "Nay, they shall depart within the hour. Our own warcraft will see to that. We have two armed boats of our own and not a Holy Pilgrim of us but is worth three of the best of the Turkish pirates, whose feet have fast hold of hell. I shall order a party out to battle."

He came forth from the cell that did duty as his office. I noticed that he limped slightly, that around his lean middle, outside the gown, was belted a crosshilt sword.

"Is this the prisoner?" he asked, turning to me. "Prisoner, I call upon you to repent your sin."

"I do freely repent all sins that lie upon my soul, Father Augustine," I replied at once. "Of the sin with which I stand charged before you I cannot repent, since of it I am entirely innocent. The guilty are those who falsely procured my imprisonment."

"He is a lying dog," grumbled the captain but I thought that the scar-chopped face and single eye of the prior lit up as though he approved my boldness.

Then another monk arrived with a sword at his hip and a half-pike upon his shoulder. At Father Au-

gustine's order he marched me away upstairs and along a gallery above.

We came into a corridor lined on either side with locked doors and full of a musty sweaty prison smell. A porter, burly and black-gowned, unlocked a heavy door of planking for me and pushed me inside.

My cell was some six feet by ten with a wooden cot at the inner end. Above this was a window, not more than a foot square and blocked by two crossbars. The walls were all of uneven cut stones, the mortar scraped away around each for the depth of a full inch—the work of many an idle prisoner. There were a stool, a jug for water, a wooden refuse bucket. The door that clanged shut behind me had a wooden sliding panel through which food could be given me or slops poured forth into a gutter.

When I stretched my hands reached up to the ceiling overhead. And when I knelt on my straw mattress I saw that my window was only a tunnel through seven feet of wall. I looked out upon a sandy shelf, beyond that to the sea.

This was my home for heaven and Lorenzo de Medici knew how long.

CHAPTER XVI

CAPTIVITY

FOR one reason alone I pass over the next six years in a few words. That is because those six years were empty—heartbreakingly empty.

I was not released from my cell except for the reason I shall relate. I knew no passage of time except by the shifting of the sunlight patch on my wall opposite the little window and by the arrival, each noon, of coarse food in a wooden plate and water in a leather mug. This was the same fare, I make no doubt, as

that of the monks who were my jailers.

On Sundays came a cup of wine and I could hear the intoning of a mass. Then I would make a mark to denote a week's passing under the date which I had scratched in the biggest stone. These weekly marks added into months, the months into years.

I found myself pacing up and down, up and down like a beast in a cage. To break myself of that frantic habit I spent hours at calisthenic exercises, which served to keep me fairly fit, and at sketching with bits of burnt wood or scratching pictures on the wall with the tongue of my belt-buckle.

My best effort was a Madonna, amusing her haloed Son with a flowery twig. As I worked thus I wondered if the picture would ever be seen by other eyes than mine. I decided that probably it would. The fortress was old and might last for centuries. I might die in the cell and another captive replace me, a captive who would look at the work of my hands and muse idly about the predecessor who had wrought thus.

Nobody spoke to me, not even the monk who thrust in my daily ration. And nobody watched me. In the summer of 1474, my second in the cell, I decided that escape was not impossible.

First I detached a leg of my bedstead and with this as a lever worried the crossbars out of my window. They had been set in mortar and had sharp points. Stealthily I began to widen the narrow aperture, working each night and restoring the bars by day lest someone look in from the outside and bring my labors to naught.

After a month I decided my diggings adequate—but they were not. Trying to wriggle through I became jammed in the window tunnel and there I was forced to stick until a goat-keeper, chasing his charges around the walls, happened to spy

my protruding head. It took two muscular friends to drag me back into my cell and I was marched between them to Father Augustine.

The prior spoke sadly upon my prideful and rebellious nature, urged me to pray for forgiveness and a softer heart, then sentenced me to a term of bread and water—and a flogging. When an attendant came with a knotted bundle of thongs and laid them like burning wires upon my bared back, rage swallowed my reason.

A sudden jerk freed my wrists from those who gripped them and I tackled my flogger, threw him heavily and clutched his throat with both hands. Half a dozen of the Holy Pilgrims, as ready to do battle as to pray, dragged me free before I could damage the whip-wielder.

Father Augustine had watched the incident with an appraising light in his single eye. "You refuse to be corrected," pronounced he, very coldly.

"Keep your lash for slaves!" I retorted passionately. "I will die before I submit!"

To my considerable surprise he nodded understandingly. His eye danced a trifle and his wide lips smiled, revealing other lean white teeth than the one which showed through the notch.

"Be it so," he granted in a more humane tone. "I remit the flogging. But you must be closer penned. Brethren, put him in the cell below his old one."

THEY did so. The new prison was smaller and for bed had only a shelf under the window, spread with musty straw. The window itself was crossbarred and looked out upon a face of hewn rock. This part of the fortress was below ground and a foot-wide trench was all that gave me air and light.

Gloom and closeness were new burdens upon my soul but I had gained one advantage—the stern ap-

proval of the prior. To him I sent request for a lamp and pen and paper. These were given me and I had surcease from ineffable ennui in writing and drawing. Among other things I set down in outline most of the story told here in full. That outline is spread before me as I write these words and is a check against my irritably failing memory.

I kept up my exercises too, shadow-boxed on occasion and incised more pictures upon the wall. Even so I had many hours in which to meditate upon the injustice of Lorenzo's decree concerning me and upon the things I would do to Guaracco if ever I came within reach of him. Of Lisa I tried not to think.

In the fall of 1474 and again two years later, attacks were made upon the fortress. There was a cannonading from the stronghold and in reply from ships. Once an effort was made to storm us. I heard commotion, fierce yells, the clash of steel. In the end I could hear that the austere soldiers of the church had repulsed their assailants and for a day the castle rang with chanted psalms of praise.

I grew to have a philosophic sympathy with my jailers. They had acted upon agreement with Lorenzo in imprisoning me. They confined me closely only because they must. If my food was plain, my bed hard, so were theirs. For the rest they were sincere worshipers and fierce fighters. The world was full of worse people.

Thus I reasoned but still it was a desperate struggle to remain contented and sane. I tried to remember *The Prisoner of Chillon*, which had one or two stanzas to comfort me, the captive, but it would not come to mind. In any case Lord Byron would not write it for a good three hundred and forty years.

The spring of 1477 saw yet another attack by enemies, a strong and more stubborn effort to carry

the fortress of the Holy Pilgrims. I could hear the battering of a wall close to me and the overthrow of part of it. So hot was the fight, so narrowly balanced for an hour, that the very jailer monk rushed from the corridor outside my cell to help defend the ramparts. During his absence I had time to do a thing I had long planned to do.

The lamp that lighted me was an iron saucer with a central clip to hold aloft the wick. I ignited the straw of my bed and, holding one edge of the lamp saucer in a fold of my jerkin, contrived to heat the opposite edge red hot. Then, with a loose stone for a hammer and the bed shelf for an anvil, I pounded, reheated and pounded again until I beat that rim into a knifelike edge. After the battle the jailer returned but he had not heard my noisy labors. And I began to whittle at my wooden door.

The planks were thick and seasoned almost as hard as iron. But I persevered all that stifling summer. I counted myself lucky when, between one dawn and the next, I shaved away as much as a handful of splinters. Bore some it was and eventually heart-breaking, for my first burrowing brought me to metal. I dug at another place, hoping to avoid such a barrier, but found more—more, that is, of the same sheet.

Eventually I had removed almost all the door's inner surface and found myself confronted with a copper plate, a central layer, probably with as much wood outside as I had already disposed of. My tappings and proddings convinced me that it was solidly massy except for the small slide-covered opening for food.

I am afraid I both cursed and sulked. I had no cutting tools. The blunt-edged piece of glass I used for an occasional shave was far from adequate. Even if I had had tools—file, chisel or drill—I would not have dared use them for the

noise would attract guards. What then?

Acid came to mind—sulphuric acid. But where to get it? The stones of my cell were volcanic, might contain sulphides. But how could I burn or distill them? Even if I got the acid, would not its strong odor bring investigation? I approached the problem from another viewpoint, considering not the best acid but the most available.

Chilly fall was upon us and the sharp strong wine was served daily instead of on Sunday only. Once again I was inspired.

WHEN my next food was brought I pleaded for a little vinegar to medicine a chest ailment. It was brought me in a saucer and I steeped in it some shavings whittled from my door. When they seemed sour enough, I placed them at the bottom of my wooden bucket.

Into this, day after day, I slowly trickled my ration of wine. It produced a greater quantity of excellent vinegar—at least for metal-destroying purposes—and after tasting it I felt sure of my acid. Acetic acid, perhaps eight or ten percent at the most.

Painfully scrabbling with a spoon in the trench outside my window, I gained enough clay earth to mix with water and fashion into clumsy basins and jars. These I cautiously hardened in another fire, and employed to hold my supply of vinegar as I increased it, also for other things.

For instance I constructed a really workable distillery—a narrow-mouthed vase or bottle, suspended above a fire which I fed with chips from the door and furniture and straw from my bed. As winter came on I heated vinegar in this and the vapor passed through a hollow reed which I cooled with bits of ice from just outside my barred window. The condensed drops I caught in my cup. They were not

pure acetic acid but a liquid with a high content.

These labors lasted for months. I speak of them briefly, saying nothing of the trial and error, the ludicrous failures and the chance successes that finally made my skill and product adequate. At length, well after Christmas of 1477, I began my attack upon the copper plate that barred me from freedom.

At the height of my forehead and again at the height of my knee I constructed clay troughs against the metal. These I filled and kept filled with the acid. When the action proved slight I hit upon the device of adding salt, procured by soaking my preserved meat and then evaporating the brine, to the liquid.

Thus I got a crude form of hydrochloric acid which made an appreciable impression. I constantly scraped away the weakened particles of metal and replenished my supply of salted acid. I wrought for months and was finally rewarded when the last of the copper along those two narrow lines was eaten away.

The perpendicular acidulation was more difficult but I managed it by fashioning two clay tubes at the edges of the door, open at the top, rather like the covered tunnels built by tropical ants. These I filled again and again, sometimes pulling them down to pry out the digested copper, then building them afresh for new attacks.

Here too I was successful and one day in February I was able to pry away the whole rectangle of metal within the compass of my four acid-cut channels. There was more wood beyond but, heartened by my triumph, I scraped and chiseled until the door was almost as thin as pasteboard. To the outside view it might appear as strong as ever.

At midday of April 16, 1478, I made my bid for escape.

The attendant came to my door, pushed back the slide and stooped to thrust in my food. I had been

waiting for an hour, tense and ready. As I heard him outside I sprang, bursting through the thin wood like a clown through a paper hoop.

Landing on the monk's unsuspecting back I whipped an arm beneath his chin, shutting off his breath. He could not cry out, and his struggles availed nothing. I choked him until his limbs grew slack, then stripped off his robe. I donned this and pushed him, senseless, through the smashed door into my cell.

Then I headed down the corridor, cowl over my face, his keys in my hand. I unlocked the door at the end, mounted steps and came to an upper level. Another corridor I traversed with measured tread, as though deep in meditation, and none challenged me.

I came into the main hall, saw the doorway to the courtyard. Beyond would be the open, the beach, a boat. I would row away, they would think that a brother had gone fishing. After that I would seek land, even among the Turks. But a voice spoke at my elbow.

"You pass me without saluting, brother."

Father Augustine! He had fallen into step beside me. I lifted a hand to my hooded brow and his single eye fastened upon it.

"How white your flesh, brother. I thought that every monk of our order was tanned brown by God's sunlight. Who are you?"

THERE was nothing for it but battle. I sprang at him.

Surprise was on my side. I tripped him and fell heavily upon him. But that old priest-soldier, lame and half-blind, was as strong as I, as fierce. I clutched and pressed his throat but he caught my two little fingers in his hands, bent them painfully backward until I quit the grip.

His thumbs drove into the inner sides of my biceps, torturing nerves between the muscles, and I rolled

free of him. We came up to our feet. I struck him heavily on the jaw and his one eye blinked but he did not stagger or flinch.

Strongly grappling me around the waist, he rushed me back against a wall and so held me, despite my pummeling fists in his face, while a dozen monks, swords and axes in hand, rushed in from all directions. In an instant I was secured and Father Augustine stepped clear of me, dabbing at a trickle of blood from his scarred nose. He panted and grinned as if he had enjoyed the scrimmage.

"Here's a stout sinner," he growled. "Never did the blessed angel clip Father Jacob more strongly. Thank you for the bout, my son. Put him in my office."

There I was kept under close guard while the chief stumped away to investigate.

He returned after half an hour and dismissed the guards but kept his dagger drawn lest I attack him.

"I am amazed at the cunning and courage and labor of your attempt," he began. "How did you manage to cut through the door, copper and all?"

I described my method and he listened with interest. Several times he asked me to amplify my remarks. At length he smiled. "You have science and inspiration. How great would be your works if they were turned to honest godly uses!"

"Being held prisoner I can turn them only to an effort at escape," I replied.

"Aye, that. Your months of toil, so brilliantly planned and so wearily carried out, came to naught within short minutes. A tragedy." Father Augustine paused and meditated. Then, "My son, what if I gave you freedom?"

"Freedom?" I echoed him hopefully.

"Within limits, of course. I could take you from that cell and let you live among us. You could work more

science, with true materials to aid you instead of such makeshifts as you fashioned in prison." He gazed at me encouragingly. "Say but the word—swear that you will not seek to flee from this island—"

"I am sorry," I broke in, "but I cannot so doom myself."

"Doom yourself? But you are now held by iron bars and guards."

"And by a false charge, brought against me by a vile rascal," I finished for him. "I thank you, good Father, for your offer but I live only to escape and to avenge myself. I cannot give you a parole."

He shook his scarred head sadly. Going to the door he called his monks. "Hither, some of you," he commanded. "We must find this fellow a straiter prison still."

A new figure pushed through the circle of black gowns, a man in the dress of the world, all parti-colored hose and plum-purple mantle, with a gay beard and curling locks. Plainly he was a visitor from some Italian city.

"Surely," quoth he, "this is Ser Leo, the artist and scientist, who is held captive by order of Lorenzo the Magnificent."

"Aye, that," Father Augustine nodded. "You know him?"

"I know him," was the reply. "Where doth he go now?"

"To an *oubliette*, I fear. From there he will need wines to rise."

Two of the armed brothers had torn away my disguising robe and now marched me down steps, more steps, to a level of natural rock where no light shone save a torch. One of them hoisted a great iron trap-door. I looked into a bottle-shaped pit, that was at least twelve feet deep.

At that moment the upper levels of the castle wakened to noise—a blown trumpet, a chorus of yells. The two monks turned to look. I tightened my sinews for a desperate fight against them before I might be hurled into that tomblike prison. A

flying figure came downstairs.

"*The infidel Turks!* Their galleys blacken the seas! Come to the defense!"

"As soon as we lower this captive into—" began one of my guards.

"No!" A bearded face looked over the black-clad shoulder of the news-bringer. It was the visitor who had recognized me. "Bring him along. He will help fight!"

"Well thought of!" came the deep voice of Father Augustine, higher on the stairs. "Free every captive who can bear arms! Let them fight for life!"

We all raced up the steps together.

CHAPTER XVII

DEFENSE OF THE FORTRESS

MOUNTING to battlements around the upper wall of the castle we saw that the sea was indeed full of craft. There were galleys, a full dozen, many smaller *feluccas* and open rowboats, swarming thick as a school of mullet. Drums resounded from the larger ships—and horns. Our own bugles braved back defiance.

Father Augustine was rasping orders like any seasoned captain. "Man and load each gun," he commanded. "Line the walls—keep lookout for where they may land." His eye found me. "Ha, wrestler! Canst use a sword?" He motioned to an aide, who thrust a hilt into my hand. "You have fought your fellow Christians overlong. Fight now against infidels!"

I shifted the weapon to my left fist, trying its balance. At an opposite rampart stood the man who had recommended my joining the defense and to him I made my way.

"I do not know you, sir, though you know me," I said. "Thanks

for saving me from that spider's hole into which they would have thrown me."

"We will speak more of it anon." He pointed to where, inside the little harbor, lay a trim sailing vessel among the boats of the Holy Pilgrims. "Yonder is my craft and upon it a fair lady who must not set foot on this monk-owned island. I pray heaven naught befalls either of them."

But I showed him where some of our men strung a heavy chain at the mouth of the inlet. That would prevent the approach of enemy boats, which in any case sought to storm us from the other side.

At that point the wall dropped straight to the sea and had been badly damaged not long before—perhaps in the fight a spring ago when I had heard crumbling of stones. The brothers had built it up roughly with broken masonry and spaded earth, faced it with timbers and logs, but it was still the weak spot of the defenses.

Even the stone flooring at the top had collapsed and was replaced with planking—while instead of an adequate parapet a work of earth-filled goatskins had been laid in and topped by a great log, nearly a hundred feet long.* From this log ran back crosspieces, lashed on as slanting supports.

Here the fire from the galleys was concentrated. Round shot tore holes in the goatskins and let out cascades of the heaped earth, while a blizzard of arrows and slings picked off such of the brothers as manned the log-topped parapet. The others crouched low.

"They will seek to carry this quarter," announced Father Augustine sagely, limping across to the log.

His gown, looped up to kilt length, showed steel greaves upon his

shins and he had thrown back his cowl to don a plumeless helmet. A bolt from a crossbow struck his shoulder, then glanced away. He must have been wearing a steel cuirass under his robe.

"Aye," he called, "here they come, a hell's spawn of boats, under their fellows' fire! Keep down, brethren, until they mount our wall. Then the fire must slacken and we will meet the unbelievers with an argument they will understand."

Drawing his sword, he spat between big hand and worn hilt.

I dared look over the log. A shoal of boats swept swiftly toward us from the galleys, boats filled with gesticulating and howling Turks. I saw the glitter of their mail, the curves of their flourished scimitars, the upward jut of helmet spikes from their turbans. A moment later a jagged little stone sang upward and against my forehead—slung like David's pebble from a sling. Like Goliath I fell sprawling on my back, half dazed and almost dropping my sword.

Father Augustine leaned farther from his point of vantage, careless of the rain of missiles.

"They raise ladders!" he cried. "Here they mount!" He turned to his followers. "Strike, brethren, for the true faith!"

I made shift to rise, a little shakily, and watched as a line of black-robos came swiftly forward over the planked-in floor, swords and axes and halberds at the ready. The sound of firing had ceased from galleyward as Father Augustine had predicted. A moment later, a yodeling cry rose from below.

"*Uhululullahuakbar!*"

One prolonged bellow of challenge and of profession. Then the outer side of our log was lined with turbaned bearded heads.

The storming party was upon us, eager for trouble. Nor could they have come to a better place to find it.

* A log of this length was by no means rare in the Fifteenth Century, well before the deforestation of 1842.

The Holy Pilgrims hurled themselves upon the attackers, calling upon the name of every saint in the calendar, hewing and thrusting like fiends instead of clergymen. At their head and in the hottest press nimble hobbled Father Augustine, his straight sword playing like a striking adder against a whole forest of scimitars.

Something impelled me in his direction and in good time for him. While his point was wedged in the neck-bone of one adversary another charged close and, catching him by a fold of his gown, slashed a scimitar viciously at his head.

The blow was turned by Father Augustine's helm but its force staggered him and a second effort beat him to his knees. With a whoop the Turk lifted his blade for a third and finishing cut but at that moment I hurled myself between, my own steel forestalling his.

He was a deep-chested fellow, brown as chocolate, with mad foam on his black beard.

"Ya Nazarini!" he snarled. "Ya 'bn kalb!"*

And he fell furiously upon me. But for all his fierceness I was more than his match. First my slicing lunge laid open his face, my second bit into the side of his neck. He collapsed, bleeding from nose to mouth, to die even as I turned away.

The surviving Turks were reeling back, whipped along by the savage garrison. They tumbled down their ladders and rowed hurriedly away in their boats under a new curtain of shot and arrows.

Father Augustine was up again, glancing around to estimate the situation.

"We suffered sorely but they suffered worse," he commented. "What says Holy Writ? 'Blessed be the Lord my strength, who teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight.'" He turned his eye on me.

"Thanks for the rescue, my son. Yet I make no doubt that with heaven's help I could have risen and overthrown him. Whence will come the next assault?"

WE FOUND out soon enough. Three great galleys moved against the mouth of our inlet. Our gun crews toiled madly but could not batter them back. When the galleys had drawn close a great throng of little black figures dived overside and began to swim for the inlet.

"By heaven, I see that they carry axes!" spoke up my friend, the bearded visitor. "They will attack the chain! If it is cut they will come in and seize our ships!"

"A sortie! A sortie!" yelled Father Augustine. "Out, brethren, and meet them in the water!"

He led the rush downward himself, leaving only the armed prisoners and a dozen black-robos to hold the upper ramparts. We watched, fascinated, from above as the monks burst from the great gate, hurried down to the water's edge. Some of them were shot by crossbows on the galleys but the greater part reached the water and swam forward to meet the Turks. There was a fierce clumsy mêlée in the waves that lapped along either side of the chain.

"The brethren triumph!" pointed out a monk at my side. "Look, the forgotten of God are retreating, swimming away."

"They do so more readily than I had hoped," I replied, thinking of the previous stubborn assault. My own words gave me a new disturbing wonder. "What," I demanded, "if it were a false attack to withdraw us from our own defense?"

Even as I spoke I saw that the galleys were pulling away with all their oars, skirting the rocks narrowly and speeding around to the point from which the earth-mended wall had once been stormed.

* Arabic: "Oh, Christian! Oh, son of a dog!" Perhaps spoken by a Saracen rover.

"*Rally! Rally!*" I shouted and led the rush across to the rampart of earth-bags and log.

It was as I had been inspired to guess. The sea was full of boats again, scores of them, rowing swiftly forward to the attack. A spatter of shafts and shot made the few of us who were left put our heads down.

"What is to be done?" demanded a wide-eyed brother with a smear of gore on his chin. "See, their whole force comes to this side, more than the first time! Their rush will beat us back and our comrades outside, returning from the chain, will not arrive in time to hold the castle!"

"Stand to the rampart, hurl down their ladders!" stoutly shouted an armed captive.

As he leaned forward to suit action to word a crossbow bolt whacked into him and he crumpled across the log, dead. The rest of us crouched low, swords in hand, determined to die hard.

I found myself kneeling beside one of the lashed crosspieces that propped the great log which was our temporary coping. It was none too firm, that crosspiece, I judged. And again I was inspired.

"*Hark ye, all!*" I cried at the top of my voice. "We can save ourselves! Form in parties by these crosspieces! Clutch them in your arms! If we bear with all our strength at once, it will force the great log forward and outward!"

"To what good?" demanded another.

"To overthrow the ladders as we cannot with such a fire against us. Do not argue, friends, but do as I say!"

There was no time or hope otherwise. In a trice we formed in half a dozen knots, all crouching or kneeling, our weapons flung down and our arms wrapped around the cross-timbers.

Whoops and execrations rang from beneath us, where the ladders were being reared from the boat

bottoms to give access to our fortress. I felt my heart race like a drum-roll but kept my eyes steadily on the parapet, where the spiked ends of the ladders showed.

"*Allahuakbar!*" thundered the enemy and again a row of heads shot up into view.

"*Now!*" I shouted my loudest and taxed all my muscles to drag forward on the crosspiece I clutched.

There was a concerted grunt from every defender as we bore mightily against the log. And, as I had dared hope, so it was. The mass of timber slid gratingly forward, as a drawer slides from a bureau. With it swayed the storming ladders, so precariously balanced. They toppled. A single concerted shriek assailed heaven from the many throats of those who were suddenly hurled back down among the boats and into the surf.

Dragging back our timber defense we cheered each other in wild and thankful joy.

That unexpected reverse gave the Moslems pause—a blessed, blessed pause—enough for the return and remarching of the swimming sortie led by Father Augustine. He clapped my shoulder with a hard hand.

"You have saved this holy place," he told me, "and if it were in my power to free you—"

He turned away to thunder new orders. I stood alone for the moment, then a hand clutched my sleeve. I turned, to see the bearded man, whose name I did not know but who knew me, the man whose boat was in the little harbor below.

"Come," he said softly. "If he cannot give you liberty, I can."

"How?" I demanded, hope pounding in my breast.

He did not pause to reply but drew me with him to the stairs and down. We went unchallenged through the lower part of the castle and came to the gate. He unfastened it and we stepped outside.

"See," he bade me. "The Turkish

boats have all gone around to the other side, hoping to make good that assault which you foiled. Now is my time to flee. I have too fast a ship for them to catch and I will take you along."

I was too amazed and thankful to speak. A moment later we had hurried down, sprung aboard his half-decked sailing vessel and were headed out for that quarter of the sea just now unguarded by either Holy Pilgrim or infidel Turk—the sea beyond which lay the Italy from which I had been carried captive six years before.

CHAPTER XVIII

RETURN TO FLORENCE

JUST as soon as my feet were on deck my enigmatic friend hustled me into the cabin, where he left me alone. I heard his shouted orders on deck, felt the ship move. We sailed out, unchallenged and unchecked, and headed northwest. I heard the muffled noise of a fresh attack on the fortress but we were not pursued.

After some time the master of the vessel appeared. He offered me a razor, with which I thankfully took my first decent shave. A mirror showed me my face smooth again but no longer fresh and boyish. My brow was cleft with a brown mark, my nose and chin had hardened and my eyes blazed with challenge and truculence. Over one temple rose a purple bump, where the Turkish slinger had struck me. Not a pretty face.

My rescuer was offering me new clothes. I pulled on dark green hose and a velvet doublet, then looked in surprise at the cloak he offered—a cloak of Florentine scarlet.

"Why, it—it is *mine*!" I cried. It was given me by—"

"By Guaracco," he supplied. "Yes. From him I took it."

"But Guaracco caused my imprisonment," I protested.

"He now causes your release," was the answer. "He knew through spies that the Turks would attack. He arranged that I come to the fortress in good time for that event, with instructions to help you escape. It took but a word to draw you out of your cell and into the ranks of the defenders. After that— But you will know all anon. Stay in this cabin for it would be ill for any sailor to see you and gabble in port."

I stayed, perforce, all that day and for some days following. We talked no more about my strange rescue, and I could learn nothing at all of the reason for it. At last, on the morning of April 25th, we docked. Peeping through a porthole, I watched the mariners tie us up to the pilings.

I raked the shore with my eyes, on the lookout for Guaracco. I wondered what I would find to say to him.

In the midst of this my companion entered. "Here is a fellow-passenger of yours, whom I at last show you," he said.

With him was a slender figure, cloaked and masked as at a carnival. Saying nothing this figure handed me a folded and sealed parchment. On the outside was the address, written in the fashion of the time:

THIS TO THE HAND OF MY
KINSMAN, LEO,
QUICKLY.
QUICKLY.
QUICKLY!

Wondering, I broke the seals and read:

*My dear cousin and partner,
Do not think me neglectful if I have left you, like a dagger in a sheath, until the time was ripe to use you. For the ill you have known*

at my hands, I now make full amends. I have prospered in Florence and power shall be mine and yours. Come and aid me as I shall aid you.

Guaracco

I looked up again, with an exclamation. The figure had unmasked and dropped the cloak. It was Lisa. Her deep dark eyes looked into mine.

"I have come to take you back to Florence," she said mechanically.

I stared at her and my eyes must have been like those of a frog. "What is the matter, Lisa?" I asked.

Because something was the matter. She seemed to move and talk in a dream.

"I have come to take you back to Florence," she said again.

Guaracco had done it—had put his spell upon her and sent her here. Nay, he had sent her all the way to the perilous fortress to assure my own obedience to his call. I gazed at the letter, crumpled it in my hand. It was baleful, foreshadowing tricks and traps.

"Will you come?" Lisa asked.

She spoke in the measured tone she might have used when purchasing meat from a butcher. Her eyes were upon me, drawing my gaze to them, but they only half knew me.

I could not refuse. Guaracco had known as much when he had sent her after me in this state. I felt fear and rage and mystification but I could not send her back alone.

"Come," I said and flung my red mantle around me.

We went ashore. Another familiar figure was on the dock—a tiny figure. Guaracco's uglier dwarf.

"Welcome." He greeted me softly.

"Our horses are ready at yonder hostler's." He silenced my question with a finger on his twisted lip. "Guaracco will tell you all. Trust him."

Trust Guaracco? I did not know whether to laugh or curse.

We rode swiftly away in the

brightening morning, Lisa and the dwarf and I.

THE horses were good and I found mine easy to manage, for all I had not put foot in stirrup for six years. Lisa must have worn men's clothes beneath her long cloak, for she rode cross-saddle and she neither spoke to me nor looked at me. The dwarf led the way, hunched over his mount like a trained monkey.

We took the road that once I had galloped with Lorenzo's officers. This time we paused once, at an inn where fresh horses awaited us. We changed to them and took a cup of wine and some bread and goat's cheese as we sat in our saddles. Eventually, as sunset came, we rode into the valley of the Arno and in the dying daylight I saw Florence yet again, a white city caught midway on the silver cord of the river with green fields all around.

But as we came near a gun sounded and the dwarf grumbled that a watch would be set at the gates. For my sake, he said, we must not enter there. I might be recognized for all the change in my appearance.

We turned therefore into the yard of a waterside house above the city, where our hideous little guard whispered to certain acquaintances of his. We left our horses and boarded a small barge. It dropped downriver with us, drifted stealthily within the walls and under the bridges, came at last to a wharf where we disembarked.

Almost immediately at hand was a house I knew, the house where Guaracco had once offered me the hand of Lisa, where we had experimented and quarreled together, where he must now be waiting for me. We walked along the street that led to the front door and there at the door we paused. Still Lisa did not speak.

"Knock," the dwarf bade me.

As I did so, I divined the presence

within of a watcher. But there was no response, no audible movement even. It was only when Lisa, prompted like me by our companion, spoke her name aloud that we heard a clang of bars and the door opened a trifle to show a face.

It was Guaracco's other dwarf, the handsome one who acted as porter. The ugly little man came close to my side. Both of them held drawn swords and their eyes, turning up to me, were bright and hard.

"Come in," whispered the one who acted as porter. "They wait for you."

I started to speak to Lisa but she was walking around the side of the house. I entered the front hall to learn what lay in store for me.

There stood a sizeable oblong table, littered with papers, and men sat in chairs along its sides, seven of them. Guaracco alone I knew and he stood up at the head of the board, his face toward me. He did not seem changed in so much as a red hair of his beard or a gaunt line of his figure. At sight of me he cried out as if in joy and bustled around the table to me. Before I could move he caught me in his arms most affectionately.

"My cousin! My cousin!" he was saying and his grin was within six inches of my face. "You 'ave come as I begged to help me in my great triumph!"

His right arm, clasping me around the body, had slid under my loosened mantle. Now it pressed something against the middle of my back—something round and iron-hard, the muzzle of a gun. If I moved quickly or denied him I would die on the instant.

With that pistol-bearing hand urging me forward, as though he still embraced me, he led me to the head of the table and there kept me beside him.

"This is my kinsman Leo, gentlemen." He introduced me to the company. "He is the man I told you of,

whose wonders you have heard me speak of in times past. He has more scientific miracles at his fingertips than all the saints in the calendar."

"I know him," said a fragile shifty-eyed man in black and crimson. "He was once pointed out to me at the palace and it was said that Lorenzo set great store by him."

"Are you then satisfied?" Guaracco asked the company. "With him as our helper thereafter, can we fail?"

"If he is true to us—" offered another.

"I vouch for that," promised Guaracco, his gun prodding me.

Their silence gave him consent and he went on. "All is agreed then. By this time tomorrow night we shall be in full possession of Florence, in a position to dictate to Tuscany as a whole. The oppressors will have shed their last drop of blood, the magistrates will sneak and act only as we see fit to bid them."

His embrace relaxed, his pistol ceased to dig into my backbone, but I knew that it was still at the ready in his hand.

"The people?" asked a thickset man in a leather doublet. His eyes burned from under black brows the width of a thumb.

"The people will offer no trouble even if we cannot rouse them," Guaracco returned. "Was it not you, Captain Montesecco, who have had charge of gathering two thousand hired soldiers outside the walls?"

"I had charge and I have done so," replied the man addressed as Captain Montesecco. "It is well we strike at once ere so many armed men cause suspicion. Yet Florentines are many and valiant—"

"We can count on many supporters in the city," interrupted the fragile man in black and crimson. "We Pazzi have servants and dependents to the amount of several hundred. Our houses are close together in one quarter and a rising of our household would mean the rising of all that part of Florence."

AS HE mentioned his family name I was able to identify him as Francesco de Pazzi. He was one of the family of Florentine bankers not as rich or powerful as the Medici but as ambitious.

"All of us stand ready," he was continuing, "with influence, men and arms—all, that is, but my cousin Guglielmo. You, *Ser* Guaracco, advised against telling him of our plan."

Guaracco's rufous head nodded. "He is married to Lorenzo's sister. Later, with his brother-in-law and the rest out of the way, Guglielmo will be glad to join us. But not now. Your uncle, Giacomo, the head of the Pazzi—what is his temper tonight?"

"Of course, I did not bring him here," said Francesco de Pazzi, "for he has archaic ideas about fair play. Howbeit he knows that there is to be an arising against the Medici, whom he has ever hated as upstarts and thieves. He will lead the muster of our men."

Another of the group about the table gave a little nod of approval. "He was tall and high-shouldered, a scraggy-necked fellow in a purple *houppelande*, and he had a shallow pinched jaw like a trowel.

"What is my task?" he inquired eagerly as though concerned lest all the blood be spilt by other hands.

"A task worthy of Francesco Salviati of Pisa," Guaracco flattered him. "I rely upon your eloquence and courage. Either may suffice—both will be invincible."

"You intend," said Pazzi, "to assign him to the palace?"

Guaracco nodded. "I shall put some of my best blades in your charge, Salviati," he announced. "At the appointed time go to the Palazzo Pubblico, where the magistrates live and sit in judgment. I will draw a diagram."

Dipping pen in ink he began to sketch on a white sheet for all to see, "Once up the stairs," he instructed, "you come into a hall.

There ask the guard to summon the magistrate of the day. While he is gone let your men pass through this door which you will see upon your left hand.

"It leads to an antechamber large enough for them all to wait. The magistrate will arrive and you will tell him that liberty is at hand for Florence. If he will he can join us. If not call forth your band to make him see wisdom."

"And my assignment?" prompted another, one of three who sat together at the right hand of Guaracco. He was a youngish hook-nosed fellow in good clothes with a look about him of fine breeding gone to seed. "I have a sure hand with a dagger."

"I mind it well, *Ser* Bernardo," Guaracco said, and smiled. "You and *Ser* Francesco de Pazzi will strike down Giuliano and see that he does not rise again. Have I your approval, Bernardo Randini?" It was plain that he had it and he turned his smile toward Captain Montesecco. "Our friend the captain promises to deal Lorer to his death."

"An' I miss stroke, may my sword arm wither!" vowed the sturdy soldier.

"Meanwhile"—Guaracco's eyes slid toward me—"we have with us a fighter the nonpareil of any. Leo, my kinsman, known as Luca, the admiral for freebooters who has lashed the Moslems to their kennels for six years. He is famed, admired and knows more about warfare than any man living. I will place him as our general!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE CONSPIRACY

QUITE well I knew now why Guaracco had thought to drag me into his scheme. He would serve

himself with my brains and skill as so often before. It was one more item that made his plot complete. Even I, within minutes, saw how the rebellion would succeed.

The conspiracy was not for a single blow but several, all accomplished at the same moment. Lorenzo and Giuliano, the heads of the Medici, were to be assassinated. The Palazzo Publico would be seized and the officers there taken into custody by armed men.

The adherents of the plotters would rise in an impressive manner, swaying the unsuspecting and perhaps dissatisfied citizenry by their cries and promises. And to guard against the forming of a violent resistance two thousand mercenaries were ready to march into the city.

It could not fail. With the fall of Lorenzo's power my exile and danger would be past. Yet my paramount impulse was to cry out against so ruthless a measure.

But if I spoke so my life would be forfeit. I would not live to get out of the room. I remained silent while Captain Montesecco asked when and where the Medici brothers were to be struck down.

"Tomorrow morning," said Guaracco. "At church."

"Church?" repeated the captain.

"Aye. Tomorrow is Sunday, you will remember. We cannot be sure of getting them together at any other time. Cardinal Riario* is to say mass at the cathedral, which will insure their attendance. We will be ready for them, each nearest his man. At the moment when the hose is elevated and all attention directed thither—"

"Nay!" The leather-clad figure started from the chair. Montesecco's black brows lifted into horrified

arches. "I cannot draw swords at that holy moment. God would be watching me!"

GUARACCO chuckled and so did Francesco Salviati, the trowel-jawed man in purple. But Montesecco was not to be laughed out of his impulse.

"I have sworn to help," he admitted, "and I shall do so or my name is not Giovanni Battista Montesecco. I will command the mercenaries, raid the palace, help to rouse the city—but I cannot and will not do murder in the cathedral!"

"The man of blood shows himself blood-drawn," sneered Pazzi.

"Say you so?" gritted the captain. "If you will take a sword in hand, Messer Francesco, you will end up more blood-drawn than I."

But Guaracco caught Montesecco's leather-clad shoulder in a big, placating hand. "None call you coward, Ser Giovanni," he assured the mercenary. "Withdraw this part of it if you will—none will blame you—and we can use your talents elsewhere. Bernardo Bandini, you are still ready to deal with Giuliano?"

Guaracco's wise glance shifted to the two men who had not yet spoken. Both were clad in black and their faces were somber to match.

"What do you say, Antonio Maffei? Methinks you lived once in Volterra, which Lorenzo saw fit to sack and destroy?"

My mind leaped back to Volterra. Guaracco had managed its destruction primarily so as to get a crystal of alum for our unsuccessful time reflector, but he must have made other plans in connection with that apparently senseless cruelty. For one, he had discredited me when I might have been a stumbling block.

He was able now also to use the incident against Lorenzo. For Antonio Maffei was saying with growling relish that the scent of Lorenzo de Medici's blood would smell sweet to the saints in heaven.

* Cardinal Riario was a nephew of Sixtus IV, then Pope of Rome. Some have tried to connect him with the Pazzi conspiracy but the great mass of evidence shows that he had no other connection than that a cardinal's presence at the cathedral would insure the presence of the two brothers Medici.

"He is a devil," he garnished the conceit, "and merits urging to hell."

"Your gossip, Stefano da Bagnone there, will help you?" asked Guaracco. "You make a sign of assent, Stefano, as I take it. And I may provide a third for your dagger party." Again he glanced sidelong at me. "We need not speak further tonight, gentlemen. Let us meet early on the morrow, and then to work."

HE LET them out by a rear door. Of the group he detained Francesco de Pazzi for a moment, advising him strongly to keep an eye on Captain Montesecco, who had turned strangely squeamish for a professional killer. Then, when all were gone, he wheeled upon me with a sultry grin of welcome.

"Welcome home, lad," he cried. "Fine things are to be our doing within the twenty-four hours."

"Murder, you mean?" I flung at him. "Anarchy? Riot?" I walked close to him, "Lisa, under your power of will, brought me hither. I demand that you free her and at once. She and I will depart before another hour is passed."

"I think not," he said in his familiar easy manner of a master but I snarled in scorn.

"I am vastly different from the man you lyingly accused to Lorenzo. I am a killer! Bring on your dwarfs and see if they frighten me. I came here only to take Lisa away and by the Saints I shall do so."

"Lisa?" he repeated. "Where is she?"

And I realized that I did not know. "I was beforehand with you," he continued. "I hold her hostage for your good will and support. Yet all may be well." He waved toward a chair. "Sit down."

I did so and he talked. The Pazzi, he said, powerful and extravagant, were on the verge of bankruptcy. They slavishly sought to work under him for overthrow of the Medici, forgetting that when the overthrow-

ing was complete Guaracco would rule through them and could, in good time, overthrow them also.

"Florence is as good as mine tonight," he said. "After Florence other states. All Italy." He beckoned. "Come."

He led the way down some rough stairs to the cellar where we had once worked together. It seemed stacked with firewood until he kindled a lantern. Then I saw the stacks were of weapons.

There were rifles and bayonets, boxes of grenades, machine guns, canisters that must hold high explosives and many another baleful thing. Toward Guaracco I turned a wondering face and he laughed the old superior laugh.

"I quarried these weapons or the knowledge to make them from that bemused mind of yours, Leo. I had two years to delve into your trances, six more to forge and fashion. What ordinary army could stand against me?"

"You have soldiers?" I asked him. "When first you came you saw the worshippers I governed by tricks of deviltry. Those and more like them will rally at my call to use these arms. After that—but, Leo, you cannot demur longer. You and I cannot succeed without each other."

Again he plunged ahead with the wild sketch of his plans. After the subjugation of Italy, the subjugation of France and Spain—a united and submissive Europe would toil for Guaracco, its lord of lords. Cristoforo Colombo would be sought out, given his fleet and sent to America to win its wealth.

"Once you fancied such an empire," he reminded me. "Am I not the true master sorcerer, with whom all things come to pass?"

"Not all things," I demurred. "I remember that I foretold the defeat for such a master—death. It will come to you."

His eyes turned frigid. "Seek not to kill me unless you want to lose

Lisa. Join me and she is yours. Otherwise I may give her to Bernardo Bandini for stabbing Giuliano. Or I might use her to persuade that overgodly mercenary, Montesecco. You can have her only if you are my devoted lieutenant."

"Lisa loves me," I said stoutly.

"Only at my bidding. My will commands her."

I gazed at him as though I had never seen him before. Not that I had not known him from the first day as a dangerous scoundrel. Not that I had not always hated and feared him. But at last I knew that I must not delay. He must die for the sake of Lisa and myself and all the world.

In one motion I bared my sword and darted it at him. He reeled back with a cry but no blood came. My point had turned against a concealed shirt of mail. He extended his arm, dangling the lantern above an open cask.

"There is powder inside," he warned. "Attack and—"

I HESITATED only a second, then turned at the sound of pattering feet. His two dwarfs were at me, ducking under the sweep of my sword to close in. But I brought down the pommel of my weapon upon the head of the hunchback even as he shortened his own blade to thrust. Down he fell and I sprang across him and darted upstairs.

"Lisa! Lisa!" I cried. Only the roared curses of Guaracco answered me. He was pursuing, a rifle in his hands.

"You cannot catch me!" I yelled on inspiration. "I go back to my prison!"

I gained the front door and ran out. Away I fled, past Verrocchio's *bottega*, around a corner to a broader street and toward the heart of Florence. For I had only pretended that I was fleeing the city.

What now? Seek Lorenzo and warn him? Dared I show my face

to him? Ahead of me loomed the Palazzo Publico, destined for a stirring scene of tomorrow's uprising. I had a sudden hope and plan.

Unbuckling my sword I hid it in a bush. Boldly I went to a side door and knocked. A porter opened to me.

"I am the locksmith," I said. "I come to fix the antechamber door."

"I heard no orders," he temporized but allowed me to enter and mount the stairs to the upper floor.

Here were a reception hall and a door opening to the left. Guaracco had designated it as an ambush for the braves who would follow Francesco Salviati. I examined its heavy lock and with my dagger made shift to drag it partially from the door. Still watched by the suspicious porter, I tinkered with its inner works.

"Now it will serve," I told him and went my way.

To all appearances I left the lock as it had been. But I had bent a spring and pried out a rivet. Any man or men, going into that room and closing the door behind, could not get out again without the aid of even a better locksmith than I.

After that I sought a livery stable and with the few coins that were left in my pouch hired a horse. Somehow I wheedled my way past the watch at a gate and made the best time darkness would allow to the old familiar country house which Guaracco still kept.

A single caretaker opened to my thunderous knocking. Without ceremony I drew my sword and swore to cut out his liver if he forestalled me by word or deed. He tremblingly made submission and I locked him in a closet. Then I took a lamp down to the cellar workshop, where Guaracco had tested my scientific knowledge on our first day of acquaintance.

It was in a dusty turmoil but in a corner, among odds and ends of machinery, was what I had hoped to find—the remains of our unsucces-

ful time reflector. I checked the battery, found it in bad shape, but materials were at hand to freshen it. When I had restored it to power I procured salt from the kitchen and mixed a great basin of brine. Finally I attached two wires to the terminals of the battery and thrust their ends into the liquid.

I watched carefully. Electrolysis commenced. The bubbles that rose at the negative wire would be liberated hydrogen. Those at the positive end were what I wanted. From a bench I brought a glass bottle, holding more than half a gallon, filled it with brine and inverted it above the stream of bubbles.

Steadily the gas crowded out the salt water, showing greenish yellow. I stoppered the bottle as it filled, then charged a second and a third. Finally I drew the wires out. The bottles had earlike rings at their necks, and I strung them on a girdle under my cloak.

They were now a weapon for me that Guaracco had not dreamed of—for I had produced chlorine gas, such as had poisoned armies in the first World War, the war that was still centuries ahead of me.

As I finished the work Sunday dawned grayly. I released the frightened caretaker and rode once more to Florence.

CHAPTER XX

TURMOIL

UNDOUBTEDLY, as I have said, the Duomo—Saint Mary's of the Flower—was the second cathedral in all Christendom. I was there, gas-bottles and all, the next morning before Cardinal Riario began to say mass.

I tried to lose myself among the throngs of worshipers who strolled most informally among the banks of

seats in the octagonal choir space beneath the great open dome.

For once I was glad of the natural darkness that clung in the cathedral, lighted only by the ornate upper windows.

At the high altar the cardinal, young and handsome for all his high dignity, was intoning the service. I found a shadow beside a carved wooden screen and tried to shrink my height by bowing my shoulders under my mantle.

More worshipers appeared and more, brave in all the colors and fabrics of Sabbath costume. A tall ruddy head and beard showed among them—Guaracco, I saw at once. In my heart I prayed that he would fail to see me and he did. He was looking for other things and perhaps he believed that I had indeed fled Florence.

Then on the other side of the choir a flash of blue velvet, a smiling handsome face. It was Giuliano de Medici* and his arm was linked with that of Francesco de Pazzi as though with a close friend. On the other side of Giuliano and a little to the rear walked Bernardo Bandini, the dissolute young gentleman on whom Guaracco threatened to bestow Lisa.

And then someone strolled past me—Lorenzo—a gorgeous figure in a crimson *houppelande*, sword at side, chatting with a crooked, smiling young man—Agnolo Poliziano, the poet. Behind them, tense and pale, slunk two dark-clad figures, the assassins Maffei and Bagnone.

I took a step toward the ruler of Florence. I drew in my breath to shout a warning in the midst of the holy service. I saw Guaracco approaching beyond some chairs.

It was then that the host was elevated at the altar. The young cardinal's voice rang out the prayerful words that, all unknowing, would

*Giuliano was ill on this fatal Sunday, but Francesco de Pazzi and Bernardo Bandini went to his house and urged him in a friendly manner to attend mass.

signal for violence:

"Ite, missa est!"

Maffei, the vengeful Volterrano, who was closer to me than Bagnone, stepped suddenly forward, clutching at Lorenzo. His dagger twinkled in air.

I seemed to move of an involuntary stimulus. Had I been a true Florentine, I would have paused to draw sword and would have been too late to save Lorenzo. Being an American and from the Twentieth Century, I struck with my fist. Maffei staggered under the blow, his thrust went awry. It glanced along Lorenzo's neck.

"Beware, Your Magnificence!" I cried and struck Maffei again, a roundhouse blow.

He turned halfway toward me catching my knuckles on the point of his chin. Down he floundered in a flurry of black robes and I set my foot on his dagger hand. The weapon clanked on the floor, and I kicked it away.

All had become howling confusion. My gas, I saw, would not affect only Guaracco's party, but the whole congregation. I dared not release it. At last I thought to draw my sword.

Across the octagonal space chairs were overturning and horrified people were scurrying and gesticulating. For a moment I saw Giuliano's blue velvet form struggling on the floor while Francesco de Pazzi, with his knee on Giuliano's breast, struck viciously with his dagger. Other swords were out on all sides.

"Down with the Medici oppressors!" I heard Guaracco trumpet.

A CHEER answered him for the service had been liberally attended by members of the conspiracy. The cardinal, his young eyes wide with horror, was drawing back from the altar and a priest in black robes was trying to lead him away. Maffei had risen and was running before my sword-point. I turned to

see what was happening to Lorenzo.

He had drawn his own sword and was parrying the wild dagger thrusts of Bagnone but his wound streamed blood and the terrified Poliziano hampered him by clinging to him.

I hurried to them and thrust hard at Bagnone but my stroke was turned, for as Guaracco had done the night before this conspirator wore mail under his gown. Yet the digging jab drove him back. I gestured Poliziano toward a doorway with my weapon.

"Is that the sacristy?" I shouted. *"Get him in there and bolt the door!"*

"Giuliano!" Lorenzo was shouting back. *"Is Giuliano safe?"*

But I gave him an unceremonious shove and a moment later Poliziano had dragged him to the threshold.

"Down with the Medici!" yelled Guaracco again.

His voice was near and I faced upon him and half a dozen of his supporters, who were rushing to cut Lorenzo off. I threw myself in their way, quickly wadding my cloak into a shield, and engaged several blades at once. I heard the clang of the door behind me and the shooting of the bolts.

"Medici! Medici!" I roared, fending off my assailants. *"Murder! Help, honest men, murder is being done!"*

"Medici!" someone echoed and never have I heard a sweeter voice.

A robust cavalier in plum-purple hurried to my side. He too had a sword and struck manfully at the conspirators. His example fired others. In a trice the entire floor of the choir was a mêlée of jabbering voices and clashing steel.

Several armored guardsmen made their appearance. I saw Guaracco fleeing. I followed suit, for I remembered that Lorenzo, whose life I had just saved, had doomed me.

The public square outside the cathedral was swiftly jamming with people, some armed and angry,

others frightened and mystified. All were talking at once, and nearly all were shouting "*Medici! Medici!*" In this quarter at least the people were for their ruler.

A fellow in a jerkin of falding, with gray hair and a cast in his eye, stopped me with a fierce clutch even as I emerged from the cathedral.

"Is it true that *Ser Giuliano de Medici* is slain?" he asked.

"I fear so," I replied. "I saw him struck down."

The gray head shook dolefully but the one good eye lighted up. "Come to the Palazzo Publico, young sir," the man urged me. "There is good sport there."

"What sport?" I asked, panting from the excitement.

"*Salviati* and some cutthroats went up to seize the magistrates. But the bulk of them were trapped in a room. The door had a spring lock."

Joy surged into me. My device had worked. "How then?" I cried.

"Some guards and friends of the *Medici* came and seized the lot," he replied with relish. "Even now they are being hanged from the windows like hams on a rafter."

FIERCE as it sounded the news came gladly to my ears. *Guaraccio's* conspiracy had failed in part at the cathedral, had failed utterly at the palace. But I had no time for rejoicing. Elsewhere in the city fresh danger was rising.

"Nay, come with me," I bade my new friend. "I know of better sport still." I raised my voice. "Hark, all true *Florentines* and servants of the *Magnificent*! Who will fight for the *Medici*?"

"*I!*" stoutly called a youth, brandishing a cudgel. "And *I!*" came another volunteer. "*!!!*" chorused others. Half a score offered themselves in as many seconds.

"Then follow," I said and set off at a trot for the *Pazzi* quarter. I now held a bottle of chlorine gas in

each hand. The fellows set up a shout of enthusiasm or excitement and ran at my heels.

We had not far to run. Out of a narrow side street rode a man on horseback—a square-faced man, bright of eye and straight of back for all the whiteness of his hair. He wore gold-filigreed armor on chest and legs, and waved a sword. Armed footmen came at his heels. "*Liberty! Liberty!*" he was shouting. "Overthrow the oppressors!"

He had to be *Giacopo de Pazzi*, the aged but sturdy head of the rebellious family. Behind him were marshaled the retainers of his house, a good hundred—and dangerous looking. And masses of citizenry pressed from other streets to stare, perhaps to join.

There was nothing for it but audacity. "*Medici!*" I thundered in return to the *Pazzi* slogan and flourished one of the gas-bottles as though it were a battle flag. "Forward, loyal *Florentines*! Smite the assassins!"

My own following set up a shout and pressed forward with me. I had more adherents than I had thought at first. Doubtless we had been reinforced by others as we passed along the street. But *Giacopo de Pazzi* was not the man to be daunted. He had come out looking for trouble and seemed glad to find it. Yelling a war-cry, he came toward us at a trot.

His horse alone would scatter my band for we were all afoot. I made a decision and hurled my first gas bottle. It burst on the pavement several yards ahead of the old man and he checked and stared. I ran ahead and threw the second.

It smashed even closer to him. The cloud of gas, rising and mixing with the air, must have been driven sharply into his eyes and nose as well as into the nostrils of his horse. The poor beast snorted and reared. *Giacopo de Pazzi* kept his seat with difficulty. Coughing, he dropped his sword and clutched at his throat

with his hand. A moment later his frightened steed, out of control, had sidled into the foremost of his own men, throwing them into disorder.

The onlookers knew less of what had happened than Giacomo de Pazzi but he had lost command of the situation and the balance of approval tilted from him. Hoots and jeers rang in the air.

"Medici!" I screamed again.

"Medici! Medici!" echoed back from all sides.

I hurried almost into the midst of the Pazzi party. From my belt I tore my third and last bottle bomb and threw it. It broke only a few feet from me and the fumes blinded and strangled me as well as others. I retreated as best I might, coughing and dabbing at my tear-filled eyes. But though I could not see that final dose of irritating gas must have completed the job of halting the rush to dominate the city.

I heard an increasing hubbub of loud shouts for the Medici, and when my vision cleared at last I saw a flash of armor. Guardsmen were making their appearance, threatening the parade with swords and pikes. I saw the foremost armed servants of the Pazzi faltering and drawing back, crumpling the head of the column. Some darted to right and left, losing themselves in the crowd.

Giacomo de Pazzi had recovered somewhat from his taste of chlorine. He was no coward but he knew when he was beaten. He spurred quickly around a corner and away before we could reach him and drag him from the saddle.

I thought that he might reach the gates and escape and did not begrudge him that boon. To me he seemed the least grisly of all that group of rascally plotters.*

* Giacomo de Pazzi was a simple and decent man, who might not have approved of the entire conspiracy. He was later captured, and his mutilated body tossed into the Arno. Another conspirator, Bandini, was a fugitive for months, but was finally haled back to Florence and hanged from the Palazzo Publico.

An officer of the guard passed close to me, and I hailed him. "How goes it at the palace?" I asked.

"The rebels are all taken or slain," he answered. "His Magnificence is safe and has spoken from a balcony, begging that there be no more butchery and asking that the survivors be delivered to fair trial. He urges peace even while his tears stream for his dead brother."

"It is not over yet," I admonished him. "Keep watch on the gates. Some mercenaries have been gathered there to help the conspiracy."

"They will never enter this city," he assured me.

I turned from him toward the Arno.

There was one more thing to do and its doing lay with me to do it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CHRISTENING

CLOSE to the riverside Guaracco's house never looked so quiet and yet so forbidding. I ran to the door and tried it. From within a voice challenged me quietly, cautiously.

"I am from Guaracco!" I called at once. "All is lost in the city."

There was a rattling of chains as if the barrier were being lowered and I did not wait for the door to open. With my shoulder I bore strongly against it and it creaked back.

A cry of profane execration greeted me. One of the dwarfs, the ugly one I had stunned the night before, swung up his curved sword. But my own point was quickly in this one's throat and he crumpled on the threshold, his oaths dying into a blood-choked gurgle. I hurried inside without waiting for him to cease struggling.

"Lisa!" I shouted as I ran through

room after room. "Lisa, where are you?"

"Leo!"

It was muffled, little louder than a whisper, but I, having come into the kitchen, traced the direction of her voice. She was beneath me. In the floor showed a great cleated hatchway. She must be in the cellar amid Guaracco's stacked weapons. Seizing the iron ring that served as handle for the door I heaved it up. Light gleamed from below.

There was no ladder or other way down but I swung myself into the hole, landing unright on the earthen cellar floor. She was there seated like a stone figure upon a great chest that must have been full of ammunition. Beyond were the stairs that led to the front of the house. Her eyes sought mine in the lantern light.

"Leo," she murmured, as softly as a sigh of wind. "You've come back."

"Fly away from here!" I gasped at her. "These devil's machines and weapons shall be destroyed within the minute. And we are leaving Florence forever—before Guaracco finds us. Or Lorenzo does either."

"But I must stay," she protested, as though she reminded me of the obvious. "I was told to wait."

"Told by Guaracco?" I cried hotly, for it now was manifest to me that he had bound her to her place by hypnotism, stronger than shackles.

"Guaracco, yes." Her dark head dipped a little in agreement. "He said that all would be well. A new Florence would be built with no oppression."

"Lies, lies!" I cried passionately. "He tried to form himself a devil's kingdom here, erected on spilt blood and corpses." I caught her hand. "Come, Lisa!"

I got her to her feet but it was like lifting a straw dummy.

"I was told to wait, Leo," she said.

My hands seized her shoulders and I tried to shake her into consciousness.

"Lisa, do you love me? Or is that only an illusion too, turned on and off by Guaracco like the spigot of a wine cask?"

"Love you, yes." She was definite enough.

"Then come, I say." I backed toward the stairs, drawing her along with me. She looked ahead and saw something. Her eyes widened, her mouth opened to cry out.

"Leo—danger!"

She tore from my grasp and scurried around me so that she was between me and the stairs. I turned on my heel only swiftly enough to see what she had seen.

Guaracco had descended upon me and his hand was lifted, holding something that gleamed. I heard the bark of an explosion, saw a sudden ghostly puff of smoke. And Lisa sagged against me, into my arms. Her eyes were suddenly bright and wakeful again, and her mouth tremblingly smiled. I eased her slackening body to the floor. I knew that she was dead.

"Do not move, Leo!" warned Guaracco hastily. Still at the foot of the stairs, he leveled his weapon at me pointblank. "This fires six shots! It is one of the guns I made according to the science I gleaned from you."

It was indeed a revolver. His thumb had drawn up the hammer and the muzzle stared me between the eyes. I gathered for a spring but paused. I did not fear to die but I feared that Guaracco might live.

"You have failed," were the first words I spoke to him.

"Failed?"

His eyes flickered down toward Lisa. With his rebellion crumpled around his head he could still smile in triumph.

"Failed," I said again. "Lisa was under your spell but she broke it to save my life. She loved me. Her love was more than your dirty conjuring tricks."

"True, true," he admitted smooth-

ly. "And I am glad after all that she did save your life. Leo, there is still time and opportunity for us to help each other."

I curled my lip in contempt but he went on: "Many have died today. Why should we? If you do not understand, Leo, look at what else I bring."

His free left hand extended toward me and between thumb and finger flashed a globule of rosy-silver light. "It is a pearl," he intoned in a new voice. "The pearl of sleep, Leo. Look upon it!"

I LOOKED. I felt my senses sway but held them firm. It was only a pearl. The light did not wax or blur or brighten. I was resisting his spell. It was only a pearl that Guaracco held, trying to spellbind me with it. But I stared and would not let it have power over me.

"You are going to sleep, Leo," Guaracco was intoning. "To sleep—and all is well between us."

I gazed, my mind at work. A way opened to revenge and victory if I were cunning. Slowly, stiffly, simulating trance, I took a step toward him. He thought himself the winner.

"Leo, Leo—I am your friend," he dinned into me. "I am Guaracco, who adopted you as his cousin, who made you great and wealthy. And you will be grateful and help Guaracco. You will tell Lorenzo de Medici that Guaracco too fought to put down this conspiracy. Those who can testify otherwise are dead."

It would have worked had he been able truly to impose his will. I let him deceive himself, and took another step. We were almost within arm's reach of each other. The leveled revolver was bigger than and brighter than the pearl to my gaze. I kept my face gravely rapt, my eyes staring, but I was awake and resolute. Would he suspect?

"Once we are believed we can still work together, Leo," Guaracco was

insisting. "Plan again, and better. We may yet rule the world!"

I threw myself upon him.

He pulled the trigger but my right hand was upon the revolver. Pain bit my thumb, that I had thrust between breech and hammer, and the firing pin drove deep into the base of the nail. A moment more and I wrenched it away and flung it behind me. It exploded with the shock, and the bullet sang into the beam overhead. A moment later we had both drawn swords.

"You triple traitor!" growled Guaracco, parrying my first lunge. "Come then if you will have death this way!"

I made no reply but deflected his riposte—the trick he had learned from me. His chest was exposed to a return riposte but I knew the mail that defended it and swept my blade in a quick arc. He got his brow out of the way with millimeters to spare.

Falling back he tried to clutch at another pistol, one of a heap in an open box, but I nicked at his out-flung hand and got home. He whimpered. Two of his fingers soared away and blood fountained forth.

"Wait, Leo!" He changed his tune at once. "I must not die if you expect to live and —"

I did not expect to live and made him no answer. His sword was up and I beat it momentarily aside and slashed at his face. Quickly he parried but only half broke the force of the blow. His cheek was laid open and his beard suddenly gleamed a deeper red.

"The time reflector," he yammered at me, on sudden inspiration. "Only I can show you how to rebuild, improve, get back to your own age!"

He should have saved his breath, for he was panting and choking. His thrusts were unsteady, easy to foil. My digging lunge at his belly, while it did not pierce the chain mail, drove most of the wind out of him. It drove out the fight, too. He

tried to retreat to the stairs but misjudged and brought up against the plank-faced wall. He threw down his sword and lifted his hands.

"Mercy!" he begged. "I surrender! Leo!"

His unwounded right palm spread itself against a stout timber. I darted my point at it, all my weight behind. A tremulous, unmanned howl from Guaracco—his hand was spiked to the wood by my blade like a big pale spider on a bodkin.

Then I let go my hilt and stepped back. I spared no eye to my enemy's plight nor ear to his prayers.

Lisa lay still and misty pale but there was no blood on her calm face. I closed her eyes, straightened her body and folded her hands upon her quiet breast. In her last instant of life her mouth had fallen into the little close-lipped smile I had known. Kneeling almost to earth I kissed her once and her face was still warm.

"Leo, Leo!" sobbed Guaracco in shameless entreaty. "What will you do?"

He was trying to seize my sword and wrench it away but the point was tightly wedged into the wood and his free left hand, shorn half in two by my previous stroke, could not grip the hilt.

I let my actions answer him. From its peg I snatched the lantern. With my foot I stirred some straw and rubbish into a mass against the foot of a barrel. He saw what I intended.

"There is gunpowder in that barrel!" he shrieked.

I knew it but still I spoke him no word. With all my strength I dashed the lantern down. The glass shattered, the straw blazed up. And then I raced away up the steps. Behind me fire gushed luridly.

AT THE door of the house I almost trampled upon Guaracco's remaining dwarf, the handsome one. He stared at me in mute horror, then at the glow behind me. He seemed to read in my face what had

happened, for he scuttled past and dived into that flaming cellar.

"Master! Master!" he screamed.

I gained the street, ran along it for more than a score of paces before the whole world seemed to turn into thunder and lightning. I was flung to my face, skinning my cheek on the pavement, but I rose and ran on. That was the end of Guaracco's house—his weapons—his dwarf—himself—Lisa. Nothing remained for me to do save to go and give myself up to Lorenzo. . . .

In the evening I stood in the groined, frescoed chamber where first the ruler of Florence had given me audience. Lorenzo de Medici was seated opposite in his chair of state, across the ebony and ivory table. His collar hung loose over his neck bandage but otherwise he was the same Lorenzo as ever—alert, self-contained, far-thinking.

"I am driven to believe all points of your strange story," he said gently. "And no one can deny that you have saved Florence and me. Poliziano says so and so do the officers of the guard. I grant you full pardon and I ask you to pardon me. It seems that I drove you away once by my misjudgment. It shall not happen again."

I bowed thanks but I could think only of Lisa. He read that tragic thought.

"Sorrow touches you, my friend, as it has touched me. My brother died today as did your sweetheart. But perhaps work will comfort us both and Florence hath need of my rule and your science."

"You are right, Magnificence."

"Yours will be a great laboratory," he promised. "Aye, and a studio of your own in the gardens of San Marco. Above all, honor and safety. But one chief change must be made in you."

"And that?"

"This matter of your strange journey from another age, which though I believe I do not begin to

understand. It must remain a secret. Since the death of Guaracco and your lady Lisa, you and I alone know it. Others might think you a devil's apostle, and urge that you be borne to the stake."

He paused, pursed his lips, as if completing some decision. "Therefore it is expedient that we provide you with an ordinary birth and family among us—a father and all the rest."

"A father?" I echoed him, not comprehending.

"Aye, that. I know the very man—an attorney who is in my confidence and who has several children already. If I ask it he will gladly own you as yet another son. The records can be arranged in various offices to make it believable. Forget that barbarous unpronounceable surname of yours. The name of the attorney, your new father, is Piero da Vinci."

"Da Vinci!"

I sank back into my chair, impli-

cations rushing upon me with bewildering shock and speed.

"Leave all arrangements to me," said Lorenzo. "It is my peculiar talent to make perfect all such little things." His bitterly ugly face grew suddenly beautiful with that warm smile of his. "From this day forward you are Leo—no, Leonardo da Vinci."

And I knew the rich life given me to lead, as crown of the age and inspiration for ages to come. My science gropings will show the way to doctors, to master engineers. My paintings will dazzle nations. Michelangelo will hate me too much and Raphael admire me too much but both will be the better for my examples.

One greatest picture I shall create, with La Gioconda as model to be sure but preserving the smile and spirit of Lisa, Mona Lisa. And I shall die old and great with kings weeping for me.

I am Leonardo da Vinci.

ADVERTISEMENT

Do We Have to Die?

Thirty-nine years ago in forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman named Edwin J. Dingle found the answer to this question. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange power that knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong can be solved.

In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Thirty-nine years ago he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die, when a strange message came—"They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the

guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his 21 years in the Far East. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power, which there came to him.

Within ten years, he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the world's leading geographical societies, for his work as a geographer. And today, 39 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send to readers of this paper a 8,000-word treatise. He says the time is here for it to be released to the Western World, and offers to send it, free of cost or obligation, to sincere readers of this notice. For your free copy, address The Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. A-18, Los Angeles 4, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly as only a limited number of the free books have been printed.

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THE LOST HOUR

By Alexander Samalman

ONE day in March, 1980, Earth's scientists discovered that the world had lost one hour of time.

Beneath the globe's surface a molten mass of matter, which for a century had bubbled and boiled as if stirred by the fires of hell, subsided in its mad upward surge.

Concurrently fissures on the crust of the Earth closed. There was a change in the eternal rhythm of Earth's contraction and expansion

and a consequent lowering of its surface.

Local disturbances were reported—however, as the severest shocks were felt at the North and South Poles and under the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, no general cataclysm took place.

The occurrence was the subject of a lengthy statement by Professor Aldous Grant, world-renowned physicist.

Professor Grant was quoted as

follows in the Daily Record for March 10, 1980:

These phenomena which we are witnessing are not unfamiliar to scientists, although they have never been as marked as at present. Because of internal disturbances our sphere's rate of rotation or the length of the terrestrial day is undergoing a change.

As early as 1880 astronomers noticed certain irregularities in the motion of the Moon. These were inexplicable and in a strict sense are inexplicable to the present day.

Irregularities in the motion of the Sun were also observed. Checking these against the irregularities of the Moon it was discovered that they coincided. This left no alternative other than the assumption that the true change is in the speed of the Earth and not in the speed of either Sun or Moon. At various times in the past, notably in 1790, in 1897, in 1917 and in 1960, the Earth's speed was subjected to sudden changes.

These changes have been attributed to contraction and expansion of the Earth's crust due to altered temperatures within the molten layers. In the nineteenth century the effect of these erratic pulsations was the lengthening of the year by one second. In 1950 it was observed that an opposite effect was obtained—the apparent length of the year becoming shorter by almost a full minute.

The present disturbances, however, bid fair to break all records. We have been losing time at an unbelievably swift rate. Nothing has as yet been done to adjust ourselves to this acceleration. Nevertheless it is doubtful whether—

IN A dark prison cell, a man was preparing to die. Praying fervently he sought to make peace with his God.

Ralph Frazier knew he was innocent but the circumstantial evidence was all against him. And so he had to die.

The sentence was definite, left no room for doubt. He was in a strange land and thus far nobody had come to his defense.

The words echoed in his tortured mind—"To be hung by the neck until dead on the morning of March eleventh, nineteen hundred eighty, at or before five o'clock—"

It was shortly before the fatal hour when they called for Ralph Frazier and marched him into the prison yard. He looked up at the sky for what he thought would be the last time—and suddenly he gasped. The Sun was high in the heavens.

"Look, padre," he said to the dignified figure at his side. "It is past dawn."

The guards gaped their astonishment. In the prison yard stood an ancient sundial. Ralph Frazier pointed to it. "It is six o'clock according to that sundial over there."

It was true. Although every clock in the vicinity proclaimed the hour of five the evidence of the sundial could not be denied.

"Our clocks must be out of gear," said the warden. "But it makes no difference. Let us go ahead."

"Ah, no," spoke the padre. "The young man must not be executed for God has wrought a miracle on his behalf. You must grant him the privilege of a re-trial, according to the laws of this community."

Benevolently, the padre patted Ralph Frazier's head. "My son," he said, "thank the Lord for this precious chance that has come to you to prove your innocence."

Ralph Frazier was conducted back to his cell, where he flung himself upon the stone floor and wept in prayer and gratitude.

DR. JAMES HOSKINS was roused from his sleep by the insistent ringing of the telephone. He looked out of the window and saw that it was dawn. The voice over the wire was anxious and grief-stricken.

"We waited until day came," the mother spoke nervously, "but the baby's condition hasn't improved. He is very feverish now. Oh, Doctor, we don't know what to do and if you can hurry—"

It meant a long trip across extremely bad roads in the heart of the woods. Dr. Hoskins sighed as he

dressed. Life wasn't easy.

When he arrived at the baby's bedside he took one look at the flushed face of the tossing infant, rolled up his sleeves and set to work.

"He'll pull through, all right," he said comfortingly. "But if you'd waited another ten minutes before calling me it would have been too late."

THE dictator of a large empire was giving his final instructions to his espionage chief. "You hold the fate of Esthinia in your hands," he said gravely. "My people there are ready to overthrow the government—but they need your guidance. Your presence would electrify them, spur them into action."

"But I can't reach Esthinia," said the spy. "Not if, as you say, the mission is so secret that I can't use a plane. The route is heavily guarded and there's a price on my head in the intervening territory."

"Under cover of night you can work your way through," the dictator advised. "I order you to go now—and you will be there in time. You must not use a conveyance of any kind, for your preparations would be observed and there's no one I can trust. This is of the utmost importance."

As he made his way through forest and field in the darkness the spy realized the vast significance of his mission. Once he presented himself in Esthinia the spark would be put to the powder keg. Revolution would flame! There would be war and conquest, glory and widespread disaster! But—the Esthinians would not act without him.

The dictator wanted revolt—it would establish him as the ruler, the man of destiny over a much larger empire than that he now controlled. If, however, the spy were stopped before reaching his destination the threatened uprising would peter out.

Nearer and nearer he came to the

border. The darkness and his own cleverness in avoiding detection were serving him well.

Suddenly he looked up and was startled out of his wits. Had the night passed so quickly? The fingers of dawn were painting the sky.

Now the spy became frantic, hastened toward his goal. It was a mad fight against time. Scratched and bruised he tried to run through bramble and bush, vainly pounded against obstructing trees.

It was no use. Lighter and lighter it grew and he could no longer hide himself while traveling. If only he had another hour's time! He crouched under the outspread branches of a protective tree and it was then a sentry saw and recognized him.

As he was led away to a place of detention the spy trembled at the thought of the dictator's mighty wrath.

Today was the day to strike—and he had failed and another dream of world domination was shattered.

* * * * *

The report of the learned Professor Grant went on.

It is doubtful whether the current acceleration of the Earth will have any noticeable influence on the Earth's population. Perhaps the majority of individuals will be completely unaware of what has happened. Only the most astute will understand the cosmic occurrence—and even they will be at a loss to explain the amazingly swift terrific contraction and consequent acceleration of the Earth.

I predict that though we shall have lost an entire hour by tomorrow, March eleventh, life will go on in much the same way and people will devote their energies to quite the usual pursuits. Granted, of course, that present calculations are not upset by unforeseen eruptions.

Though of immense significance from a scientific viewpoint this phenomenon will pass almost utterly unmarked by and be of no importance whatever to the hurrying and scurrying beings who make up the major population of this globe.

They will soon become accustomed to the changed time cycle and after official action is taken will accept it with the same nonchalance with which they accept Daylight Saving schedules.

The CHESSBOARD of



When prophecy goes utterly awry, as in Mr. Binder's otherwise excellent novelet, the reader has a tendency to pook-pook the author on all other counts. It is the natural reaction of the Monday morning quarterback.

Yet at the time this tale was written the author's hypothesis concerning the future of Earth was entirely possible under the working of the denouement he projected. He was reflecting the wishful thinking of the times.

In regard to which we can only suggest that if this story causes any of its readers to do a little scrupulous overhauling of their own wishful thinking it will have served far more than its purpose of entertainment. So—read it and think!

—THE EDITOR.

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MARS

by EANDO BINDER



Professor Thode thought he had stumbled upon something new in his psycho-phone— only to discover that it was old stuff to the aliens who actually controlled Earth!

"CHAPTER I

THE GREAT CHANGE

STUPENDOUS things have happened in this world, but nothing as stupendous as the Great Change that came over Earth in 1938. At first it was just a subtle change, hardly noticeable. Continents did not sink nor did tidal waves engulf cities. Nothing visible or tangible occurred at all. Nevertheless it was different.

Manifestations were numerous, yet hard to define. First of all a greedy little nation, dreaming the dreams that Caesar and Napoleon had also once dreamed, suddenly and inexplicably withdrew her powerful navy from the Hawaiian Islands, thus taking away the threat

of war between herself and another great power.

At the same time she demobilized from the Siberian front, when it was expected that within a month she would have swept into the wheat fields of the north, robbing them from a frantic European nation. Not long after these two enemies signed an everlasting peace treaty.

That was the first major indication of the Great Change. It was not long after that the big powers of Europe, so delicately balanced on the verge of a disastrous war, demobilized from opposing frontiers almost all at once. And in another few months a dozen short and honest

treaties made war remote and unthinkable. Before a decade had passed all Europe united to form a commonwealth for the betterment of all concerned—a union not in name only but in fact.

These astounding results in the international field were matched by equally amazing changes in the general everyday life of mankind. People began to grow kinder toward one another. A feeling of brotherhood sprang up and waxed stronger day by day.

It is safe to say that a person taken from the twentieth century prior to July, 1938, and transported suddenly to July of 1939, would have sworn he was on some other world than that he had known because of the difference in human relationship occasioned by the Change.

For instance, up in the hills of Kentucky two lanky bearded drawling backwoodsmen, armed with rifles, faced one another shyly and finally shook hands. That was in September of 1938. A few months before those two would have shot it out between them for their feud went back a hundred years. And so on and on.

It was as though the human race had labored for countless centuries under an incubus of evil which had suddenly, in July of 1938, been wrenched away from Earth and flung into the nethermost voids of space . . .

THE two experimenters stood before a sprawling apparatus on the workbench, whose various unorthodox parts were connected with strands of silvery-looking wire but paler in color. A modest fortune in beryllium lay there and its many lines were to carry a new type of energy—a leaping sizzling kind of energy that would have burned copper to vapor and would have caused even silver to weaken and soften. Some of the coils of beryllium were immersed in vats of

liquid air to preserve them from a like fate.

A dialed panel reposed at the center of the maze with a series of button switches and illumined indicators over its surface. Hardly breathing, the two men watched the meters as the professor slowly twisted one dial after another. Up above, hung from the ceiling and connected to the panel by a single wire, was a triangle of delicate wiring, again beryllium.

It was the aerial for psychowaves.

Suddenly there was sound and the two men stiffened attentively. Yet it was not sound! Nothing came through the air from the apparatus to their ears, yet they seemed to hear voices—voices that went directly to their brains without passing through their auditory organs.

They were simply thought-waves, vastly amplified by the psycho-receiver and so powerful that they impinged directly on the auditory seat of the brain.

In awe and wonder they looked at each other's toil-lined faces as they heard the cacophonous voices of a million different people. They were hopelessly entangled, like a radio receiver attuned to the entire wave-band at once.

"The voice of the world!" whispered Professor Thode almost reverently. "The constant flow of thought that whirls about our heads and is never heard except in a few instances. Every human on Earth must always be thinking something but the thoughts can never be detected except by super-sensitive minds and then only under exceptional circumstances—those carefully arranged experiments in telepathy.

"With this sort of receiver and amplifier one can be in touch with all the world's thoughts at once. Listen now while I turn the selector dial." His face wore a rapt expression.

The scientist twisted the dial and clutched at his chest as a dry cough bent him almost double. He would have fallen except that Fred Bilte, his assistant, caught him in strong arms and helped him to a chair.

"Success, Fred! Success!" cried the old scientist weakly when his coughing had subsided.

That ecstasy of achievement had cost them ten years of painstaking research and most of the professor's fortune. Ten years before Professor Boris Thode, retired from the industrial boom that had enriched him, had said—

"The mystery of thought! How is it born? How does it manifest itself? Regardless of the contempt that science shows toward telepathy I truly believe in it. I believe that thought can be transmitted as readily as voice, as light, as electricity—if only we knew the means!"

AT THE time it seemed to Fred Bilte that they had completely lost themselves in a maze of pseudoscience. They pursued research that was only half science, the other half something beyond.

They had combed the entire ether spectrum in the search for thought-waves. Cosmic rays, gamma rays, X-rays had been the first three steps. Then had come the examination of several octaves only slightly explored by others. The ultra-violet, visible light and infra-red had been dissected for their purpose. Another little known gap in the scale next, then the radio waves, finally the alternating current waves.

Each of these had been suspected in turn of being the range of psychowaves but what they had sought had not been found.

They had gone further. Above the scale they explored waves that were possibly the answer to the condensation of nebulae but were not in any way related to thought radiation.

Then, below the cosmic rays, they came across radiations, half electro-

magnetic, half something else, that were closely related to gravitation. These had proved to be a sort of transition product between ether emanations and waves that had no measurable velocity. Just as the Archaeopteryx was a transition between reptiles and birds in prehistoric times.

The Z-rays, they were tentatively named. They had a shorter wavelength than the cosmic rays and a still more terrific penetrative power. They were apparently the next step above the gravitation rays, which were undoubtedly infinitely penetrative. In common with the latter these Z-rays had an almost infinite velocity in that mysterious sub-ether beyond the electro-magnetic ether.

It was only a year before that the professor had said eagerly, tensely, "All electro-magnetic waves have a constant speed, something over one-hundred-eighty-six-thousand miles a second. These new Z-rays below the cosmic, of a different order, must have a far higher speed, possibly beyond measurement. And the penetration of thought, though figurative, is proverbial! Come on! There's work ahead and hope!"

A month after they succeeded in first absorbing thought-waves out of the air they had completed a pair of miniature psycho-receivers modeled after the big set, with which they planned to carry out tests of range and selectivity. These were contained in small flat wooden cases that fitted easily into their pockets. The energy supply was a tiny batterylike cylinder of cellophane containing delicate coils of gossamer beryllium.

"It's simple," explained the professor at the doubt that was still in Bilte's face. "Suppose we are separated now by a distance of a hundred miles. I send my thoughts out. Your receiver picks them up instantaneously and amplifies them."

"But what amplifies them?" in-

sisted Bilte.

"Your own thought emanations!" The old scientist smiled. He was again a jump ahead of his assistant. "Your own psycho-waves, constantly contacting the receiver-coils in your pocket, induce a psycho-current which amplifies the far weaker waves coming from me.

"There is an analogy in radio transmission. Very weak stations are sometimes caught up in the carrier wave of a powerful station and are thereby greatly amplified. The carrier wave of your psycho-waves will similarly pick up and strengthen my incoming emanations."

"But then I will be receiving both sets of thoughts."

"Well, I hope"—the professor grinned—"that you can distinguish your own thoughts from mine!"

Bilte grinned sheepishly in return. "Then as long as these test receivers are done let's try them out."

"All right. You have a sister in Los Angeles, Fred, whom you haven't visited for some time?"

"Not for three years."

"Then take a trip down there and we'll see if these psycho-phones, as we may call them, will give us an unbroken connection. Each hour during the day, on the hour, we will connect up and transmit to one another short sentences of any kind, which each of us will record in writing at both ends. Then, on your return, we'll compare notes. Now pack up and go—but be back in two weeks."

CHAPTER II

MASS PSYCHOLOGY

BILTE returned from Los Angeles on July first, 1938. That date meant nothing in particular to the two experimenters but to the world it was to signify that three weeks later would come the Great Change.

A comparison of notes indicated that their connection had been complete and perfect at all times. It struck a sort of wonder in their minds to think that two humans, separated by hundreds of miles, could converse freely with but a slight mental effort.

Radio was much the same but required ponderous apparatus and much attention. With the psycho-phones communication was magically simple.

Professor Thode was elated at the success in this first step toward applied telepathy but Bilte noticed before he had been back long that the elderly scientist seemed preoccupied. Even while comparing notes and commenting on the different phases of the experiment the professor's attention wandered erratically.

"What is it, professor?" Bilte asked finally, pushing the written pages aside.

Professor Thode started, then motioned toward the laboratory. Striding to the set with which they had first received outside thought waves he snapped the on-switch. He made no motion to alter the tuning.

Suddenly it came, a loud "voice"—yet it was not a voice as their other thought pickups had been. It seemed to be more of an emotion that had somehow been converted into a psycho-wave. No actual word-thoughts were distinguishable, yet the general meaning of the message became clearer as the amplified emanations continued to radiate from the set.

Bilte looked in amazement at the professor as he felt his heart pump faster and his muscles unconsciously tighten. "Just what is it?" he asked, perplexed. "It isn't really a definite message. It seems more like a—an emotion! As if we had tuned in the incoherent thoughts of an enraged man!"

"Whatever it is," murmured the professor, "it comes in from at least a hundred different psycho-wave

lengths like a chain-station! And there's something ominous; threatening about it."

They stared at each other silently for a moment.

"Just what do you think it means?" whispered Bilte.

Withholding an answer the professor pointed to the panel board. A fine needle, delicately balanced on a sharp agate pivot, reposed there in a hollow formed by a group of beryllium coils.

"I've constructed a psycho-sensitive unit," explained the professor, "which will point to the source of any psycho-wave when connected to the big set. Watch."

As soon as the mysterious message began again to emanate from the set the sensitized needle flicked back and forth in wide gyrations. When it gradually subsided it pointed out the window across the blue of the Pacific.

"Which means," said the old scientist, "that the source of the radiation lies somewhere out in the Pacific—or across it in Asia. By the power with which it comes in, supposing it to be at least a thousand miles away, the source must be a greatly energized one. Obviously no single human mind could produce such a powerful thought-emanation without some sort of amplification."

"You mean," gasped Bilte, "that someone else has—accomplished what we have and—"

PROFESSOR Thode nodded reluctantly. "Either that or it may be the combined mass radiation of a group of people." His eyes narrowed strangely. "Mass psychology directed toward one goal—almost mass hypnotism."

"This psycho-message that we receive so powerfully and on so many different wave-lengths may be the fighting spirit of a nation, feeding and constantly renewing itself on military propaganda! You will notice that the needle pointed directly

west—toward Japan!"

Then he stirred himself under Bilte's incredulous stare. "Yes, far-fetched I know, Fred. Either of the two possibilities has me intrigued. I couldn't rest without knowing the true answer. Therefore we'll track down the source of this super-powerful psycho-radiation!"

Aboard an ocean liner speeding toward Japan, the two experimenters became daily more excited as the needle never failed to point westward to the land of flowers and sloe-eyed people. It was a half day before docking that they made a final test. They watched the swinging needle come to a rigid halt.

The professor uttered a surprised exclamation and bent lower over the needle. "Good Lord! It isn't pointing to Japan now, at least not to Japan proper. It lines up"—he hastily unfolded a map of the Japanese archipelago—"with the first of the Kurile Islands!"

He sat down weakly. "That then precludes my theory."

Bilte fidgeted uneasily. "Well, if it isn't the mass mind-delusion of a great number of people and since it can't be the emanation of one single mind it must be a mechanically amplified psycho-radiation." He shuddered a bit. "The nearer we draw to the source the more I feel a sort of involuntary animosity—a dissatisfaction with lots of things."

Professor Thode nodded. "I feel it too—rolling waves beating at our subconscious minds, stirring our fighting blood like fanfares of martial music! Foreign correspondents have mentioned that strange feeling of restlessness and militarism as though all the nation were bathed in the fiery breath of Mars, god of war—as in Central Europe in nineteen hundred and fourteen. The breath of Mars—"

The professor's voice suddenly hardened. "Suppose a Japanese scientist stumbled on psycho-phenomena in his research and pro-

gressed with it as far or farther than we—to the point where amplification of psycho-waves is possible.

"Suppose he decided to conceal his discovery from the world and instead pervert it to evil use—to the purpose of stirring his people to conquest. That man could have set up to the north, where our needle points, a powerful thought amplifier with which to accomplish his purpose!"

"Very possible," agreed Bilte gloomily. "But how could he—this hypothetical Machiavelli—control his emanations so that only the Japanese people were subject to their influence?"

"He wouldn't have to control them. The most direct and powerful of them would saturate Japan and the east coast of Asia, which is under Japanese dominance anyway. To the north and east and south the radiations would go a long way before impinging upon large groups of other races. In fact, it may be those tailings of the original radiations that have so stirred Europe today and placed it upon the brink of another fearful internal war."

It was at this point that the two men began to realize that they had stumbled onto something of major political importance.

"Fred," said the old scientist later in a fierce low voice of determination, "regardless of the consequences you and I are going to trace down this mysterious psycho-emanation!"

THEY landed in Tokyo and immediately embarked again on a coastal steamer for Nemuro on the island of Yeddo. Some seventy miles to the northeast lay the first of the Kurile Islands and the needle pointed rigidly in its direction. There was two days' delay at Nemuro before much argument and bribery convinced the Japanese port officials that the two American tourists were not spies.

In calm clear weather Professor

Thode and his assistant, chauffeured by a taciturn native, motored their way in a launch to the island at which their needle pointed a damning finger.

By judicious use of a compass and their combined sense of direction they were able to determine, three hours later, that they had reached the approximate point where the needle's line of extension intersected the coast. They landed at a stretch of weed-grown sandiness. Standing on the shore Bilte hesitated.

"We're absolutely unarmed, professor, and we don't know what we're walking into."

But the old scientist had already set the needle apparatus on the sand and again closed the switch. The quivering needle swung in a lightning quarter circle and fastened rigidly to the northwest, without the least hesitant swinging back and forth as formerly.

The two men looked at each other significantly.

"It must be very close!" whispered Bilte hoarsely.

Professor Thode was already making his way toward a fringe of gnarled bushy growths further down the shore, beyond which nothing could be distinguished. Almost like a robot he strode along and Bilte felt it would be better to check him before he ran into something unexpected. But as he was about to call he saw from the corner of his eye that the pilot was tugging at the launch to shove off. To the unknowing pilot the place seemed bewitched with ghostlike voices.

With a shout Bilte turned back and pulled him away before he could get the nose of the launch off the sand. And when Bilte next turned around the professor was nowhere in sight!

He stood a moment, undecided. Then he heaved at the launch with all his strength, pulling it as far up on the sand as he could. Thereupon he left the beach, reasonably certain

that the pilot, with his slighter strength, could not drag the launch clear by himself.

At a trot, he made for the thickets and snapped on his pocket psychophone while he ran, hoping to contact the professor in that way. But it was a vain hope as the very strength of the projector's emanations was sufficient to drown out any lesser psycho-waves.

Reaching the thickets, Bilte crashed through the bushy growths, unmindful of clinging tendrils and barbs that scratched his skin. Soon he came out upon clear land that sloped gently upward for a hundred feet, then abruptly veered off into a large depression. The professor was still nowhere to be seen and a worried frown came to Bilte's forehead.

He ran forward toward the closer edge of the large depression ahead. When he had struggled up the short slope the whole of the little valley suddenly swung into his line of vision and he stopped frozen, dumbfounded in utter amazement.

AT THE exact center of the huge depression was an apparatus whose top did not rise above the general ground level. Set on a wide spreading tripod it consisted of nothing more than a colossal metal globe whose one surface—that facing southwest toward Japan—was punctured by a flanged aperture as though from it something was meant to pour.

Evidently that was the "projector" whose existence on the island he and the professor had suspected. But the other thing his eyes saw he was not to understand until later.

Back of the projector was another spherical globe of metal but this did not seem to be a permanent part of the apparatus since it was suspended a few feet off the ground. That in itself was astounding—a large spheroid of metal hanging in the air like a feather.

At the same time Bilte saw the

projector and the suspended globe he saw the professor—and a hoarse cry burst from his throat. He had no time to shout again or to rush to his chief's assistance. The suspended spheroid suddenly leaped through the air, right over the cringing professor, who had evidently been examining the projector.

A hole yawned in its under-surface and—Bilte gasped in disbelief—the professor, without any voluntary motion on his part, rose and was catapulted into the hole as though an invisible giant's hand had yanked him off the ground.

Then the hole in the spheroid closed and without a sound the amazing object levitated itself from the ground and gradually disappeared into the blue sky.

Bilte crouched at the depression's edge for a full minute, unable to collect his scattered senses. Then he staggered in a daze back to the stretch of beach. Scratched and bleeding, enervated by the shock of what he had seen, Bilte hardly noticed at first that the pilot was frantically tugging at the launch and had almost succeeded in shoving it clear. Bilte broke into a stumbling run, shouting madly, and arrived just in time to climb into the boat with the pilot.

Hours later Bilte awoke from a mental lethargy to notice the quays and docks of Nemuro rapidly approaching. Utterly deflated in spirit he went directly to his hotel room. All that afternoon and evening he paced to and fro, trying to think coherently. What had the spherical vessel been? Where was the professor now? What was to be his fate? What should he, Fred Bilte, do now? What *could* he do?

That same evening, dinnerless and sleepless, Bilte began to think he was going mad. He imagined he was hearing the professor calling his name. More than once he half turned, ready to swear the professor must be there. Suddenly he gasped and

with trembling fingers pulled out his pocket psycho-phone, cursing himself aloud for having neglected his sole direct means of communication.

Immediately at the snap of the switch the professor's psycho-voice reverberated in Bilte's mind, calling his name over and over.

"Professor!" Bilte half-shouted.

"Fred! Thank God you've finally closed our contact. I've been trying to connect with you for hours."

"Professor, are you safe? Where are you? What—"

"Fred, stop! Listen to me. There is no time to lose. I can't tell you much because I haven't found out much. But you've got to get away from Japan and back to the States—back to our laboratory. I've been locked into a little room in this ship without seeing anybody but I know it has been moving all the time, its speed constantly accelerating, and must be going somewhere.

"That somewhere must be the hideout or headquarters of these people who have made the projector. The one thing in our favor is that apparently they don't know you were with me on that island. That means I can relay what I learn to you.

"But it will take the big set back home to do that if this ship goes much further. I will begin contacting you again in five days, whether or not you give me a return call. If I'm out of range of your psycho-phone I will have no way of knowing whether you are listening or not but it's all we can do.

"If only our big set could transmit as well as receive! Anyway I'm going to see the finish of this and pass what I find out along to you. Now get out of Japan and hurry!"

Perhaps the two servants in Professor Thode's laboratory-home were surprised at Bilte's orders when he returned from their foreign trip. A couch was installed in the experiment room beside the big psycho-receiver and meals were brought in

regularly. He ordered them to leave him strictly alone at all times, told them not to worry about Professor Thode—that he had gone to China and would be back some time in the future.

CHAPTER III

THE VOICE FROM THE ETHER

IT WAS during the evening of July 17, 1938, that Professor Thode's psycho-voice first came over the big set.

"Fred, are you listening?" it began. "How useless for me to ask a question whose answer I may never know! I have just found out several things, one of which makes it impossible for you ever to contact me with the psycho-phone.

"Fred! I told you the ship was accelerating. That puzzled me and probably you too. Only one type of ship would do that—a spaceship. Well, I'm on a spaceship!"

Bilte bit his tongue. Drops of blood fell unnoticed from his lips. The psycho-voice went on.

"Yes, Fred, I'm on a spaceship. Just an hour ago the door of my prison opened and before me stood a creature—well, a creature. I will not attempt to describe him. You can believe that I was thoroughly frightened and thought I was mad, especially when the creature spoke to me—in English—and addressed me as 'Earthman.'

"To make it short he informed me that I was aboard a spaceship bound for the planet Mars—and that he was a Martian. My skepticism must have shown itself in my face for the creature then took me by the hand and led me up corridors and passageways in this amazing vessel and finally brought me before a window.

"And there it was—Earth—a green-grey ball, hanging in space!

"You can't imagine the shock of it, Fred, nor the wonder and glory of it—seeing the heavens from a space-ship. The amazing blackness of space, the steely stars, the impression of tremendous depth, the shuddering awe of its immensity. And then Earth—but a ball, a mote, hanging in the nothingness, its surface indistinct with a gauzy halo over it.

"I wonder how long I just stood there and stared! Finally I turned to my guide. He seemed amused by my awe.

"'Earthman,' he said, 'does your mind reel at these things? I see it does. Naturally it would. I forget that the undeveloped intelligence of Earth has thought of space travel as remote and in the main improbable—if not actually impossible.'

"'Sir,' I said, not knowing how else to address him, 'this is like a miracle!'

"The creature—or Martian, I should say—laughed insolently. Fred, from that moment on I hated him! It would be hard to explain why. Perhaps if his acid laugh and the peculiar tones of his voice rang in your ears you too would promptly hate him—this creature.

"His whole demeanor was condescending and arrogant—oh, ten times more arrogant and contemptuous than the most conceited ruler of Rome could ever have been. He made me feel, during those few minutes we were together, that I was a crawling worm that had to get out of his path before being stepped upon.

"I am back in my little room—my prison—now. They have been feeding me regularly, a liquid food, very sweet but satisfying. The room I'm in has a higher air-pressure than outside and seems to be equipped especially for an Earthman. I wonder what that means?

"Of course a thousand and one other speculations have been torturing me. What were this Martian

and his companions doing on Earth? What is their connection with the projection of the psycho-wave that is inundating Japan with its insidious influence? Why am I being taken to Mars?

"At times I feel I have gone mad—or that this is a horrible nightmare. And yet it seems to be real. Fred, tell me, am I—"

THE incoming psycho-voice was jumbled for a moment. Bilte crushed his knuckles against the hard bench top till the skin cracked.

Then, came from the void, "I shall have to remember I am a scientist, Fred, and as such must keep my wits. I've figured that I have been aboard now over six Earth days and we can't be more than halfway, if that.

"I suppose you have already added a hexa-bank amplifier to the set. Probably you'll have to add another to be able to catch my waves when and if I arrive on Mars. Thank heaven psycho-waves have such a great penetrating power and—oh!"

Bilte started and turned pale at the agonized gasp that registered from the professor. Then his voice came again, broken. "Accelerating—tremendously—tons of weight—"

That was all and Bilte staggered to a chair, mopping a feverish brow. For twenty-four hours there was utter silence from the psycho-ether tuned to Professor Thode's wavelength and Bilte grew haggard in anxiety.

In the early morning of July 19th, the suspense ended. Thereafter the Professor radiated messages three separate times—a lost soul crying from a spatial wilderness. Only Fred Bilte was ever to know the full details of Professor Thode's three messages from the planet Mars. July 19, 2 A. M.

The ship has landed on Mars, Fred. When I last contacted you a full day ago our connection was broken when I was hurled against

the wall by a terrific surge of the ship. Soon after I lost consciousness and when next I opened my eyes I could see through a window that we were no longer in space but on a solid surface. In short, on Mars!

If I could somehow transmit to you psycho-television, then perhaps you might then gain some idea of this Martian city that spreads before me. Imagine spires and towers a mile high—bulbous dwelling places suspended at any and all heights—majestic edifices that could house a hundred of Earth's ocean liners—columnar decorations glinting with inlaid jewels and burnished metals—all intertwined and connected with conduits and tunnels and such.

This is a city of Mars I'm in, Fred, the *only* city!

I've found out many things. The duration of intelligent life on Mars goes back a half million years. It was then that the Martians developed their speech and writing and first beginnings of science.

Their early history—when Earth was but a primeval jungle—is curiously parallel to our own recorded story—a series of wars, famines, pestilences, revolutions and mass migrations. They had seas then and continents and islands, just as on Earth.

It was a hundred thousand years after their first written records that spatial navigation became possible to their science—and the Martians swarmed all over the Solar System. No life was found on any of the outer planets nor on their satellites by reason of their remoteness from the life-giving Sun. Mercury supported a hardy silicic form of unintelligent life. Venus and Earth were steamy pots of struggling evolutionary forms of life and man was yet unborn on our world.

Thus the Martians were sole rulers and masters of the Solar System. For the next hundred thousand years the most precious and useful products of all the different planets

were brought to Mars to further and make great Martian civilization.

BUT the next hundred-thousand-year period was a period of breaking down rather than building up. With the immense strides of their science deadly and horrible weapons of destruction were developed and the various classes and races fell on one another and waged war. These periodic wars gradually became more and more catastrophic and disastrous and the once teeming and thriving population dwindled.

It is hard to believe but my Martian mentor—his name is Sokon—intimated that for a long time the sole ambition, thought, and endeavor of all Mars was toward warfare and military dominion. First one race and then another gained ascendancy in endless cycles that might have gone on forever.

Truly, Fred, from what I've learned this planet was rightfully, even if accidentally, named after the god of war—Mars!

But it could not go on indefinitely because of the rapidity with which the population dwindled. About fifty thousand years ago all the planet lay wasted and war-torn and its denizens numbered but a few millions, scattered all over the planet in proud little isolated communities, each a deadly enemy of the others.

You can surmise that while the long series of wars went on scientific advancement was hampered and the peaceful trade fell almost to nothing. I am beginning to think, Fred, that warfare on Earth is a small thing compared to what it must be in such an advanced superscientific world.

But just when it seemed that their civilization was doomed to suicide—the few millions left would not feed their weapons more than another century—salvation came to them.

That, Fred, is all I know of the story of Mars. For some strange—and I fear awful—reason my mentor would tell me no more on the sub-

ject. How the unity of the warlike Martians was achieved, I shall tell you when I find out.

Someone is coming into my room now, Fred! Goodby! You'll hear from me—if Providence wills it—as soon as I can manage it in secrecy as I fear to transmit in the presence of Sokon.

July 20, 4 A. M.

I have finally got the chance to transmit to you again, Fred, but you will never know what torture I went through for awhile before I could bring myself to contact you once more. Perhaps it would be better that you should never hear what I have learned in the past day here on Mars.

But I have made the decision to tell you all, Fred, and if it plunges your mind into a fog such as mine, heaven forgive me for the act!

Some hours ago Sokon took me to the roof of this giant building and into an airship. In this vehicle we darted over the immense mazes of this city to its outskirts. There the ship dropped to what must be the largest building on Mars. I estimate it at a mile square, yet it is not high.

Not a word did Sokon speak all this time. But after landing on the roof of this Cyclopean structure he faced me with a strange and dreadful smile.

"Earthman," he said, "now you shall find the answers to all your questions. Look around"—he waved an arm to include the conglomeration of strange apparatuses spread all over the roof near the landing field—"and know that from here is controlled the superficial destiny of Earth!"

Of Earth! The thought rocketed through my brain and made me weak. What could he mean? I was soon to know.

The apparatus, I might explain, seemed to my wavering mind a hopeless maze of geared machinery, all covered with some transparent protective material from which pro-

truded hundreds of long thin spouts, or nozzles. Meaningless for the moment—but later they came to have a frightful significance.

Sokon then took me down an elevator, down into the building itself. I wish I could picture for you the scene that met my unbelieving eyes as the elevator door opened and I was led out upon a balcony from which could be viewed the entire interior, which was one immense room.

All around me was the gigantic columned interior. Evenly spaced across the floor were hundreds of rows of apparatuses something like organ consoles, in each of which sat a Martian.

Close scrutiny of one of the affairs just below me revealed it as a circular button board in the center of which sat the operator. As I watched his long arm with its sensitive fingers flicked buttons with marvelous rapidity, causing little pilot lights to flash. About his head was a maze of wires and tubes connected to the control board by several strands of heavy wire.

But of what use to describe to you something whose immensity and alien quality you could never grasp, except that it relieves my tired mind to tell of these common details. I will go on, as Sokon went on when I had recovered from astonishment and wonder.

Sokon returned to the previous day's talk and picked up the thread of the story he had left unfinished. The Martians, faced with self-inflicted extinction, decided at last that it was foolish to fight among themselves when they could satiate their battle lust in a way not at all harmful to their persons.

Earth had been explored, and on its surface had been found a form of life with rational intelligence, inhabiting forests and caves—Paleolithic Man. A diabolical plan was conceived and with a hue and a cry the Martians adopted it in boundless enthusiasm.

With their marvelous science and their full and complete understanding of psycho-phenomena they built psycho-transmitters capable of projecting psycho-beams all the way to Earth, which would give the Martians practical control of the activity of mankind on the young world!

CHAPTER IV

THE CHESSBOARD OF MARS

I CAN see you now, Fred, trembling and pale, not daring to believe. Yet it is God's truth!

These control boards, at each of which sits a Martian like a gloating tyrant, are psycho-transmitters which project to Earth, at the will of the operator, any sort of psycho-emotion or actual direct thought.

You will understand that the Martians have refined and improved their apparatus beyond our understanding, so that they can either fasten like a leech to one certain mind of Earth, to a group or to a whole nation—and pour their insidious psycho-emotions forth like a foul wave of slime.

And the sole purpose and aim of each Martian is to wreak as much bloodshed and harm as he can on Earth!

So all through the ages, while aboriginal man gradually arose from ignorance and darkness to the glimmerings of intelligence, the Martians have been holding mankind back, instigating wars, tribal battles, personal fights and internecine revolutions, satisfying their bloodthirsty, warlike natures in playing warlord to Earth! Like an evil entity in the heavens, the Martians have been strewing the pages of Earth history with blood and gore and hatred and discontent.

It has always been the wonder and surprise of most intelligent people

of our time, Fred, why mankind had wars at all, why there was constant bickering and battling when things could be settled so easily in more peaceful ways.

"The beast in us" it was called but actually it was the beast being put into us! And God only knows how far ahead the world might be on the road to true civilization if it weren't in the fatal bloody grip of Mars.

All through the ages then our superficial destiny has been guided from Mars by beings who, not willing to battle themselves, have instead caused battles and bloodshed on another world. Sokon tediously traced Earth history for me, with which naturally all Martians are smugly familiar. He showed me all the innumerable incidents which we thought to be the course of fate but which were really the results of the Martians' psycho-waves—a vicarious means of satiating their lust for battle.

Just to give a few instances. Alexander the Great, world conqueror, was started on his bloody career by a Martian psycho-beam that from babyhood on stirred his fighting and ruling nature. The psycho-emotion goaded him and tormented him till he had to obey its call.

Partly under its guidance and partly due to the conditions under which he lived, he swept out from Macedonia and poured blood on dozens of battlefields. Alexander's whole army was constantly under the influence of a psycho-beam from Mars, which made them so vicious and fighting mad that they swept all before them, including the Persian hosts of Darius.

Then Attila, the Hun. His invasions were first conceived in a Martian brain and then forced on him so that he became one of the bloodiest and most vicious scourges in Earth's history. His little slant-eyed troops were bathed in a psycho-beam so powerful that some of the worst atrocities of all time were the result.

Then Napoleon, the little corporal who as a youth dreamed of a great France. His dreams were not his own—they came hurtling across millions of miles of space and were implanted in his sensitive and keen mind. He arose, lashed by the hammering psycho-beams and swept all Europe, wallowing in blood, sacrificing human lives without pity.

Yet it was not Napoleon himself who cared so little for human life and suffering. It was the Martians across space who chuckled in glee when vast armies swept together and decimated one another.

Then, in the modern world that we know—the fearful carnage of the World War when mankind had advanced enough scientifically to produce terrible weapons that reminded the Martians of their own disbarred ones. In telling of this last Earth war let me mention again the building and its psycho-control boards.

The boards are divided among all the different nations that were formerly represented on Mars before their union. Each group, still as proud and hateful as of yore when they battled with guns instead of psycho-waves, concentrates itself on a certain warlike project on Earth. For instance, in the World War, the Martians decided to make it a grand and glorious game between two and only two sides.

Accordingly half the boards were then relegated to control the Allies; the other half the Central Powers.

I will never be able to erase from my mind, Fred, the unutterable look of glee on Sokon's face as he told me that never in all their fifty thousand years of playing had the Martians had so much "fun" as during the World War! It had been a grand game which had occasioned intense rivalry and they had been sorry when it finally ended!

THINK of it, Fred! All Earth, every section and corner of it, constantly under the evil influence

which darts from Mars at instantaneous velocity and submerges it in psycho-waves that have as much to do with the destiny of Earth's peoples as their own hampered efforts to rise above brutality and bloodshed.

The chief occupation of the Martians in the past ages of their civilization was warfare. Now their chief occupation is playing on this gigantic chessboard of Mars, moving humans in paths of fate as the chess player moves his pawns and pieces!

And, Fred, the Martians got so much enjoyment out of the last World War that they have again decided to play such a two-sided game. Japan is to be the nucleus of one warrior group, Russia the nucleus of the other. They plan, so Sokon tells me, to draw into this war all the nations of Earth in a grand *mélée* which they plan to make a dozen times more horrible than the last holocaust!

Furthermore Sokon informed me that the projector set up on that Kurile island, which we first thought to be the work of an Earth madman, is part of a secret plot of his to beat the other side. One of the "rules" of the game is that neither side shall set up concentration projectors on Earth itself, as this would give it too much opportunity to incite Earth and destroy it completely.

Sokon and several of his arch-plotters secretly went to Earth a year ago and set up the projector. This will incite the Japanese much faster than the enemy and cause them to arm more quickly and fight more viciously.

This reveals to me the true decadence and evil of Martian nature in general. Whatever was the initial cause the Martians grew up with a far greater heritage of warlikeness than—I am sure—ever reposed in Earth-people's basic natures.

If only there were something I could do! If only there were some way I could destroy them!

Goodby, Fred! Perhaps goodby

for good. Sokon is waiting for my reeling mind to break down. He does this now and then with Earthmen, delighting to watch them fall to pieces when knowing the truth. In case there is anything more I should want to transmit wait for me a full Earth day. If I do not call by then you will know that I am dead.

IN SILENCE that seemed to echo with the satanic leers of other-world demons, Fred Bilte moved about the laboratory with a sort of aimless purpose. He rummaged in the cabinet, taking from it papers covered with scrawled formulae.

Hours later he took the sizeable batch he had collected and burned them wholesale on the tile floor, opening a window to let the acrid smoke out. He stared until the last flame went out. The secret of psycho-detection would not leave the laboratory.

Then he went to his couch. His eyes glinting with a bleakness like that of frigid space itself, he stretched himself out stiffly. His face was like a graven wax mask. He waited, not caring to sleep. He refused entrance to the manservant with a tray of food and in the early hours of July 21st the professor's voice came again.

Fred! Fred! Are you there? Pray God you are. Sokon had not tortured me enough so he again dragged me to the chessboard of human life not many hours after the first time—and went into vivid detail more horrible than I dare to relate to you.

Suddenly an enormous thought struck me—a mad thought. Yet it may have been a sublime thought. I will soon know.

Sokon, whom I will curse in my dying breath above all other Martians as the master fiend of them all, took me into the section whose psycho-boards are on the enemy side—Russia's side, you know, in this titanic Earth war they are investigating. One of that side's members

threw a taunt to Sokon, which he returned with interest. The taunting grew and became a quarrel between the two Martians.

It was then the thought struck me. I obeyed my sudden inclination to carry it through and dashed away from the two bickering Martians and ran further into the section whose members are opposed to Sokon in the war game.

I betrayed Sokon at the top of my voice and told his opponents of the illegal projector which had been set up on Earth. Head after head stirred from the boards and jerked up.

Then Sokon came bearing down on me, having heard a little and surmised the rest. He fastened his baleful speckled eyes on me and my voice died in my throat. I uttered a brief prayer and waited for death.

But it did not come!

I opened my eyes a moment later to find a dozen Martians, all enemies of Sokon, protecting me from him. Furthermore they were demanding something from him and I could easily guess what.

I know little or nothing of just what was done then. I was led by the hand to a little cupola of transparent material which overhangs the entire interior of the building. In it are strange instruments that I surmise to be deadly weapons. This cupola seems to be a sort of policing center to insure peace in the assembly. The guns are on swivel mounts and can rake any part of the building.

I AM here in that cupola above the chessboards now, Fred. I have not been fed for several hours. My throat is parched and dry. I am numb from mental agony. Yet a faint spark of hope has been born within me. Not hope for myself—no. What does my life mean? But hope for Earth! Perhaps the investigation will result in the removal of the projector on Earth.

That there is an investigation in

progress, I know. One of the fellows up here in the cupola—there are dozens of them, equally divided in allegiance—casually told me that as soon as the right part of Earth's surface turns in the direction of Mars their powerful telescopes will examine the Kurile Islands for that outlawed projector. I asked what would be the result when it was found. He made a shrugging gesture but his hand unconsciously caressed the gun near him.

There is nothing more to say, Fred, except that there is unrest in the very atmosphere around here. I can almost feel the hatred and suspicion welling up between the two sides. What the outcome of my action in betraying Sokon will be, I don't know. But almost all my suffering at that devil's hands is repaid at the thought that at least I've put him in a troublesome predicament.

The voice ceased. Later it burst forth again, excitedly.

A message, Fred! A message corroborating my story—the telescopes saw the projector! Also they saw something more—a spaceship landing beside it and blowing it to drifting dust. Sokon had sent a spaceship post-haste to Earth to destroy the incriminating evidence of his treachery—but too late!

I hardly know what to say about things here now. Excitement is running high. Many Martians have left their boards and are gathering in little groups. There is much shouting back and forth. The very air is electrified with wrath and hatred. Sokon is down there, conferring with his benchmen. His opponents are glaring angrily in his direction for he has been a leader of the other side.

The fellows up in this gun-cage are very nervous and fidgety. They have in their hands the power to wipe out all below them. The sympathizers of Sokon in the cupola are sitting at their guns. The others are watching the scene below.

Something's beginning now!

A group from Sokon's opposition is running at him, shouting, Sokon faces about in fear—it is the beginning of a riot! They near him . . . several Martians tumble in the rush . . . *Lord!* . . . Sokon gunners just fired a livid bolt of something that whiffed a dozen Martians to dust! Now the opposing gunners retaliate with a bolt to the other side!

It is a battle royal now! Without restraint the gunners are shooting down rioting Martians! Hundreds have been converted to puffs of vapor. *Good!* This in a small measure repays Earth for the sacrifice of her murdered peoples. This thing is getting bigger and bigger—perhaps it will become . . .

Yes! Part of the roof has been disintegrated. At its edges appear Martians from the city with weapons that they rapidly install like machine-guns . . . the disintegrating bolts are becoming thick . . . the battling and rioting is turning into an actual war. I can see centuries of repression swelling into a terrific bloodlust. I see a giant airship . . . it hovers above the roof . . . the roof puffs away . . . a searching ray springs from the ship . . . it is sweeping in circles and in its path nothing remains . . . death for the Martians . . . my heart sings!

The gunners here are busy wiping out their fellowmen in absolute war madness. It is awful, the look in their eyes. Now is my chance. I am stealing over to the giant chessboard psycho-transmitter. A few twists of several different levers and I am ready to start.

I'm wiping out the entire bloody planet, Fred . . . I'm concentrating on the thought that every Martian kill his neighbor, kill himself . . . Never before have the psycho-waves been used at such short range . . . The psycho-transmitter is now focused to envelop all Mars with its waves of hate . . . I'm not leaving this machine until I have destroyed every Martian, one by one . . .

THE ALIEN

A Novelet by **JACK WILLIAMSON**

CHAPTER I

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE MOON

BEFORE me, not half a mile away, rose the nearest ramparts of the Mountain of the Moon. It was after noon and the red sun blazed down on the bare undulating sandy waste with fearful intensity.

The air was still and intolerably hot. Heat waves danced ceaselessly over the uneven sand.

I felt the utter loneliness, the wild mystery and overwhelming power of the desert. The black cliffs rose cold and solid in the east—a barrier of dark menace. Pillars of black basalt, of dark hornblende, of black obsidian rose in a precipitous wall of sharp and jagged peaks that curved back to meet the horizon.

Needle-like spires rose a thousand feet and nowhere was the escarpment less than half that high. It was with mingled awe and incipient fear that I first looked upon the Mountain of the Moon.

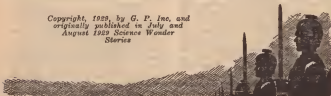
It was a year since I had left medical college in America to begin practise in Perth, Australia. There I had an uncle who was my sole surviving relative. My companion on

the voyage had been Dr. Horace Austen, the well-known radiologist, archeologist and explorer. He had been my dearest friend. That he was thirty years my senior had never interfered with our comradeship. It was he who had paid most of my expenses in school.

He had left me at Perth and gone on to investigate some curious ruined columns that a traveler had reported in the western part of the Great Victoria Desert. There Austen had simply vanished. He had left Kanowna and the desert had swallowed him up. But it was his way, when working on a problem, to go into utter seclusion for months at a time.

My uncle was an ardent radio enthusiast and it was over one of his experimental short wave sets that we picked up the remarkable message from my lost friend that led me to abandon my practise and, heeding the call of adventure that has always been strong in those of my blood, to seek the half mythical Mountain of the Moon in the heart of the unexplored region of the

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Stories*



INTELLIGENCE

*While seeking a missing scientist in the Australian desert
young Winfield Fowler wanders into a lost world where
past and future meet in a fantastic reign of terror*



Great Victoria Desert of Western Australia.

THE message was tantalizingly brief and hard to interpret. We picked it up five times over a period of two weeks, always just after sunset. Evidently, it was sent by one who had not recently practised his knowledge of code and it seemed that the sender was always in a great hurry or under considerable nervous tension, for minor errors and omissions were frequent. The words were invariably the same. I copy them from an old notebook.

To Winfield Fowler, physician, Perth, Australia—I, Horace Austen, am lost in an unknown new world, where alien terrors reign. It lies in a crater in the Mountain of the Moon. I implore you to come to my aid, for the sake of mankind.

Bring arms and my equipment—and Roentgen tubes and coils, and the spectrometer. Ascend ladder at west pinnacle. Find my friend Melvar, maiden of the crystal city, whom I left beyond the Silver Lake. Come for the sake of civilization and may whoever hears this forward it with all dispatch.

My uncle was inclined to suspect a hoax. But after the message had come over twice I received telegrams from several other radio amateurs who had heard it, and were forwarding it to me. We took the direction of the third call and had amateurs in Adelaide do the same. The lines intersected in the Great Victoria Desert, at a point very near that at which Wellington located the Mountain of the Moon he sighted and named in 1887.

Knowing Austen to be intensely human as a man but grave and serious as a scientist, it was impossible for me to take the message as a practical joke, as my uncle—deriding the possibility of my friend's being imprisoned in "an unknown new

world"—insisted it was.

It was equally impossible for one of my impetuous and adventurous disposition to devote himself to any prosaic business when so attractive a mystery was beckoning. Then I would never in any case have hesitated to go to Austen's aid.

I got together the apparatus he had mentioned—it was some equipment he had left with me when he went on—as well as my emergency medicine kit, a heavy rifle, two .45 Colt automatics and a good supply of ammunition. Then I waited for more explicit signals. But the calls had not come regularly and after the fifth no more were heard.

Having waited another irksome week I bade my uncle farewell and got on the train. I left the railway at Kanowna, and bought three ponies. I rode one, packed provisions, equipment and water bottles on the other two. Nothing need be said of the perils of the journey. Three weeks later I came in sight of the mountain.

Wellington had christened it as he did because of an apparent similarity to the strange cliff-rimmed craters of the Moon and the appellation was an apt one. The crags rose almost perpendicularly from the sand to the jagged rim. To climb them was out of the question.

The rock was polished slick by wind-blown sands for many feet but was rough and sharp above. To my left, at the extreme west point of the great curve, was a dark needle spire that towered three hundred feet above its fellows. I knew that it must be Austen's "west pinnacle." What sort of ladder I was to ascend I had little idea.

As the Sun sank back of the rolling sea of sand dark purple shadows rose about the barrier and I was struck with deep forebodings of the evil mystery that lay beyond it. The fold of the desert changed to silver gray and the gray faded swiftly while the deep purple mantle swept

up the peaks, displacing even the deep red crowns that lay like splashes of blood upon the summits. Still I felt, or fancied, a strange spirit of terror that lurked behind the mountain, even in the night.

Quickly I made camp. Just two of the ponies were left and they were near death. (I have passed over the hardships of my trip.) I hobbled them on a little patch of grass and

far away, and up, I thought, over the cliffs. Then the cloth of the tent was lighted by a faint red glow thrown on it from above. I shivered and the strange spell of the mountain and the desert fell heavier upon me.

I wanted to go out and investigate but unfamiliar terror held me powerless.

I gripped my automatic and

The Lost Worlds



CREDIT for discovery of the first "lost world" must go, of course, to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's bearded and explosive Professor Challenger, who first found the isolated South American plateau where the dinosaurs still range in a volume published in London in 1912.

Thus, as major science-fiction themes go, the lost-world idea is a comparatively new one—perhaps because the Darwinian theory of evolution was not acceptable to readers of popular fiction until the Edwardian era had tempered the whalebone rigidity of Victorian conformity.

At any rate, it arrived some centuries later than the space voyage, the time machine, the android and other sf staples.

But once arrived it quickly established itself as a basic theme and has yet to show signs of waning popularity. There is something inherently fascinating in the paleontological absurdity of little man pitted against the reptilian monsters of the past that holds the attention not only of its devotees but of motion picture producers and—yes, even editors.

For a sterling example of the genre, written and first published more than twenty-one years ago, you can scarcely do better than read Mr. Williamson's novelet, *THE ALIEN INTELLIGENCE*.

—The Editor.

brush that grew where water had run from the cliff, pitched my little tent and found brush to start a tiny fire.

I ate supper with but a scanty cup of water. Then, oppressed by the vast mysterious peaks that loomed portentously in the east, shutting out the starlight, I went in the tent and sought my blanket. Then came the first of those terrible and inexplicable occurrences that led up to the great adventure.

FIRST I heard a faint whispering sound, or rather a hiss, infinitely

waited tensely. The scarlet radiance shone ever brighter through the cloth. The sound turned to a hissing scream. It was deafening and it plunged straight down. It seemed to pause, to hover overhead. The red glare was almost blinding.

Abruptly the tent was blown down by a sudden tempest of wind. For perhaps a minute the terror hung about me. I lay there in a strange paralysis of fear while a hurricane of wind tore at the canvas upon me. I heard upon the tempest above that awful whistling, a wild mad laugh that rang against the

cliff, weirdly appalling. It was utterly inhuman, not even the laugh of a madman. Just once it rang out and afterward I imagined it had been my fancy.

Then the light and the sound swept up and away. With belated courage I tore my way from under the cloth. The stars were like jewels in the westward sky, where the zodiacal light was still visible. The ominous blackness of the mountain blotted out the eastern stars and the peaks were lighted by a vague and flickering radiance of scarlet, like the reflection of unpleasant fires beyond.

Strange pulsing fingers of red seemed to thrust themselves up from behind the cliff. Somehow they gave me the feeling that an incredibly great, incredibly evil personality lurked beyond. The crimson light shone weirdly on the wild summits of the mountain as if they were smeared with blood.

I threw more brush on the fire, and crouched over it, feeling uncomfortably alone and terrified. When the flames had flared up I looked about for the ponies, seeking companionship even in them. They were gone! At first I thought they had broken their hobbles and run off but I could neither see nor hear them and they had been in no condition to run far.

I walked about a little to look for them, then went back to the fire. I sat there and watched the eerie unwholesome glare that shone over the mountain. No longer did I doubt the existence of Austen's "world where alien terrors reign." I knew, even as I had felt when I first saw the mountain, that strange life and power lurked beyond it.

Presently I stretched the tent again, and lay down but I did not sleep.

At dawn I got up and went to look for the ponies. I climbed one of the low dunes and gazed over the gray infinity of sand but not a sign

of them rewarded my look. I tried to trail them. I found where they had been hobbled and followed the tracks of each to a place where their hoofs had cut deep in the sandy turf. Beyond there was no trace. Then I was certain of what I had already known, that the Thing had carried them away.

THEN I found something stranger still—the prints of bare human feet, half erased by the wind that had blown while the terror hung there. That unearthly laugh and the footprints—was there a land of madmen behind the mountain? And what was the thing that had come and gone in the night? Those were questions I could not answer but daylight dulled my wondering fear.

The Sun would not rise on my side of the mountain until nearly noon and the cold dark shadow of the cliff was upon me when the desert all about was a shimmering white in the heat of the sun. Austen's call had mentioned a ladder. I set out to find it. Just north of the peak I came upon it, running straight up like a silver ribbon to the top of the cliff.

It was not the clumsy affair of ropes that I expected. In fact I at once abandoned any idea that Austen had made it at all. It was an odd looking white metal and it seemed very old although it was corroded but little. The rungs were short white bars, riveted to long straps which were fastened to the rock by spikes of the same silvery metal.

I have said that the mountain rises straight from the sand. And the ladder goes on into the ground. That suggests that the sand has piled in on the base of the mountain since the ladder was put there. At any rate I am sure that it is incredibly old.

I went back to camp, packed together my guns, a little food and

Austen's equipment—and started up the ladder. Although it was no more than six hundred feet to the top, heavily laden as I was I got very tired before I reached it. I stopped several times to rest.

Once, looking down on the illimitable sea of rolling sand, with the tiny tent and the sharp shadow of the mountain its only definite features, I had a terrible attack of vertigo. My fears of the night returned until I almost wished I had never started up the ladder. But I knew that if I were suddenly back in Perth again I would be more eager than ever to set out upon the adventure.

At last I reached the top and crawled up in the mouth of a narrow canyon with black stone walls rising straight to the peaks on either side. Down the crevice was a smooth curving pathway, very much worn, it seemed, more by time than human feet.

It was not yet noon. I waited a few minutes to rest, then walked up the path with keen curiosity as to where it led. It grew so deep that the sky overhead was but a dark blue ribbon in which I saw Venus gleaming whitely. It widened. I walked out on a broad stone platform. And below me lay—the abyss.

I stood on the brink of a great chasm whose bottom must have been miles below sea level. The farther walls of the circular pit—they must have been forty miles away—were still black in the shadow of the morning. Clouds of red and purple mist hung in the infinities of space the chasm contained and completely hid the farther half of the floor.

Beneath me, so far away that it might have been on another world, was a deep red shelf, a scarlet plain as weird as the deserts of Mars. To what it owed its color I could not tell. In the midst of the red, rose a mountain whose summit was a strange crown of scintillating fire. It looked as though it were capped

not with snow but with an immense heap of precious jewels, set on fire with the glory of the sun and blazing with a splendorous shifting flame of prismatic light.

And the crimson upland sloped down—to the "Silver Lake." It was a lake shaped like a crescent moon, its horns reaching to the mountains on the north and the south. In the hollow of the crescent beyond, low hills rose, impenetrable banks of purple mist lying back of them to the dark wall in the distance.

The lake gleamed like quicksilver and light waves ran upon it, reflecting the sunlight in cold blue fire. It seemed that faint purple vapors were floating up from the surface. Set like a picture in the dark red landscape with the black cliffs about, the argent lake was very white, very bright.

CHAPTER II

DOWN THE SILVER LADDER

FOR a long, time I gazed into the abyss, lost in the wonder and the mystery of it. Meanwhile the sun climbed over and lit the farther rim, which still was black or dully red, because of the dark colors of the volcanic rocks of which it is composed. The scene was so vast, so strange, so wildly beautiful and unearthly that it seemed almost a dream instead of an ominous reality.

It was hard to realize that somewhere upon the red plain or along the shores of the Silver Lake or perhaps beneath the banks of mist beyond, Austen was—or had been—alone and in distress. I wondered too from what part of this strange world had come the thing of the whistling sound and the red light, which had taken the ponies.

It was well after noon before I ate a little lunch and took thought

of the matter of descent. I saw that a second ladder led down in a fine thread of silver until it disappeared above the crimson upland, miles below. I climbed over the brink and started down.

Descending was easier than climbing had been but I had infinitely farther to go. The soles of my shoes were cut through and my hands became red and blistered on the rungs. Sometimes, when I was too tired to go on, I slung myself to the ladder with a piece of rope from my pack and rested.

Steadily the black walls rose higher before me. The red plateau beneath, the mountain with its crown of flaming gems, the strange white lake beyond, came nearer and nearer. I was still half a mile above the scarlet plain when the shadow of the western wall was flung fast over the valley floor and the light purple mists beyond the argent lake deepened their hue to a dark and ominous purple-red.

But the Silver Lake did not darken. It seemed luminous. It gleamed with a bright metallic silvery luster, even when the shadow had fallen upon it. Whenever I rested I searched keenly the whole visible floor of the abyss but nowhere was any life or motion to be seen.

With growing apprehension I realized that I would not have time to reach the ground before dark. I had no desire to be stuck like a fly to the face of the cliff when the Thing that had made the red light was moving about.

Disregarding my fatigue and pain, I clambered down as fast as I could force my wearied limbs to move. The process of motion had become almost automatic. Hands and feet moved regularly, rhythmically, without orders from the brain. But sometimes they fumbled or slipped. Then I had to grasp in frenzy at the rungs to save my life.

Night fell like a black curtain

rolled quickly over the top of the pit but the half-moon of the Silver Lake still shone with its white metallic light. And strange moving shapes of red appeared in the mist in the hollow of the crescent. The light that fell upon the rock was faint but enough to help and still I hurried—forcing hands and feet to follow down and find the rungs. Fearfully I looked over my shoulder at the bank of mist.

Suddenly a long pale finger of red—a delicate rosy ray—shot high out of it. Up the vague pathway it sped, a long slender pencil of crimson light—a narrow sharp-tipped scarlet shape—high into the night, and over and around in a long arching curve. Down it plunged and back into the mist.

Presently I heard its sound—that strange whistling sigh that rolled majestically and rose and fell, vast as the roar of an erupting volcano. Other things sprang out of the purple bank, slender searching needles of brilliant scarlet, sweeping over the valley and high into the starlit sky above.

Following paths that were smooth and arched with incredible speed they swept about like a swarm of strange insects, always with amazing ease and always shooting back into the cloud, leaving faint purple tracks behind them. And the great rushing sounds rose and fell. Those lights were incredible entities, intelligent—and evil.

They flew more often than anywhere else over the crown of lights upon the hill—the gems still shone with a faint beautiful glow of mingled colors. Whenever one swept near the mountain a pale blue ray shot toward it from the cap of jewels. And the red things fled from the ray.

More and more the flying things of crimson were drawn to the mountaintop, wheeling swiftly and ceaselessly, ever evading the feeble beams of blue. Their persistence was in-

human—and terrible. They were like insects wheeling about a light.

ALL the while I climbed down as fast as I could, driving my worn-out limbs beyond the limit of endurance, while I prayed that the things might not observe me. Then one passed within a half mile, with a deep awful whistling roar, flinging ahead its dusky red pathway and hurtling along with a velocity that is inconceivable.

I saw that it was a great red body, a cylinder with tapering ends, with a bright green light shining on the forward part. It did not pause but swept on along its comet-like path, and down behind the Silver Lake. Behind it was left a vague purple phosphorescent track, like the path of a meteor, that lasted several minutes.

After it was gone I hurried on for a few minutes, breathing easier. Then another went by, so close that a hot wind, laden with the purple mist of its track, blew against my face.

I was gripped with unutterable terror. I let myself down in the haste of desperation. Then the third one came. As it approached it paused in its path and drifted slowly and deliberately toward me. The very cliff trembled with the roaring blast of its sound. The green light in the forward end stared at me like a terrible evil eye.

Exactly how it happened I never knew. I suppose my foot slipped or my bleeding hands failed to grasp a rung. I have a vague recollection of the nightmare sensation of falling headlong, of the air whistling briefly about my ears, of the dark earth looming up below. I think I fell on my back and that my head struck a rock.

The next I knew it was day and the Sun was shining in my eyes. I struggled awkwardly and painfully to my feet. My whole body was bruised and sore and the back of my

head was caked with dried blood. My exhausted muscles had stiffened during the night and to stand upon my cut and blistered feet was torturing. But I had something to be thankful for—I had been within a few feet of the ground when I fell—and the red thing had departed and left me lying there, perhaps thinking me dead.

I leaned against the base of the metal ladder and looked about. I had fallen into a thicket of low red bushes. All around grew low thick brush, covering the slightly rolling plain. The plants were scarcely knee-high, bearing narrow feathered leaves of red.

Their delicate fern-like sprays of crimson rippled in the breeze like waves on a sea of blood. The leaves had a peculiar bright and greasy appearance and a strange pungent odor. The shrubs bore innumerable tiny snow-white flowers that gleamed like stars against the deep red background.

I think that the red vegetation must have evolved from a species of cycad. Undoubtedly the greater crater had been isolated from the outer world when the great tree-ferns were reigning throughout the earth. And, as I was presently to find, the order of evolution in the deep warm pit had been vastly different from that which had produced man as its highest form of life.

Presently I was to meet far stranger and more amazing things than the red bush. I am inclined to believe that the extraordinary color may have been due to the quality of the atmosphere, perhaps to the high pressure or to the purple vapors that ever rose from the region beyond the Silver Lake.

Nowhere did I see any living thing nor did I hear any sound of life. In fact one of the strange things of the place was the complete absence of the lower forms of life, even of the smaller insects. The silence hung oppressively. It grew

intolerably monotonous—maddening.

Far away to the right and left the walls of the pit rose straight and black toward the azure infinity that arched the top. To my left, five or six miles away, towered the gem-covered hill, its summit a blaze of ever-changing polychromatic flame. Beyond it, all along the east, the red plateau fell away to the Silver Lake, which lay like a curved scimitar of polished steel, the faint bank of purple mist shrouding the low red hills that rose inside the curve beyond. The Sun was just above the eastern peaks, shining purple through the mist.

After a time I limped slowly down the nearest of the little valleys. As I went my roving eye caught the bright glitter of brass on the ground at my feet. Searching in the red shrubs I picked up three fired cartridges from a .45 calibre automatic.

I held them in my hand and gazed over the weird scene before me, lost in wonder. They were concrete proof that Austen had passed this way, had here fought off some danger. He must yet be somewhere in this strange crater. But where was I to find "Melvar, maiden of the crystal city"—and what was she to do for me?

Presently I went on. I wanted water to bathe my cuts and bruises. I was very thirsty as well as hungry. My pack was an irksome burden but I did not discard it and I carried the heavy rifle ready in my hand. I was still feeling very weak. After a painful half mile I came to a tiny pool in a thicket of the red scrub. I lay down and drank the cool clear water until I was half sick. I threw away the remnants of my shoes and bathed my feet.

SUDDENLY my attention was arrested by a crystal clashing sound. There was a marching rhythm in it and the clatter of

weapons. I crouched down the shrubbery and peered fearfully about. I saw a line of men, queerly equipped soldiers, marching in single file over the nearest knoll.

They seemed to be wearing a closely fitting chain mail of silvery metal and they had helmets, breast-plates and shields that threw off the sunlight in scintillant flashes of red, as if made of rubies. Their long swords flashed like diamonds. Their crystal armor tinkled as they came, in time to their marching feet.

One, whom I took to be the leader, boomed out an order in a hearty mellow voice. They passed straight by within fifty yards of me. I saw that they were tall men of magnificent physique, white-skinned with blond hair and blue eyes. On they went in the direction of the fire-topped mountain until they passed out of sight in a slight declivity and their music died away.

It is needless to say that I was excited as by nothing that I had seen before. A race of fair-haired men in an Australian valley—what a sensational discovery! I supposed that they had built the metal ladder and come down it into the valley—but from whence had they come? Or was the Mountain of the Moon itself the cradle of humanity, the Garden of Eden?

Then the weapons of the soldiery suggested that they used some transparent crystalline substance in lieu of metal, that the iridescent crown upon the mountain might be the city of the race. Was it Austen's "Crystal City?" That would suggest a high civilization but I saw no sign of the mechanical devices that are the outstanding features of our own civilized achievement. Certainly the soldiers had carried no modern arms.

Then I thought of the footprints and the eerie laugh. I wondered what contact Austen had had with these people. Had they been friends or foes? I wondered if it had been the men of the Crystal City who had

paid me a visit outside the cliffs. If so the red torpedo-shapes of the night must be aircraft and they must have advanced the art of aerial navigation to a very high and significant degree.

I determined first of all to do some spying to find out as much as possible about the strange race before I revealed my presence. I was not in a very good trim for battle and I had taken much pains for concealment when the men passed. But I had little doubt that my guns were so far superior to their crystal swords that I could fight them at any odds if they should prove to be unfriendly.

So presently I bound my feet with bandages from my medicine kit, attended as best I could to the wound on the back of my head and walked slowly on in the direction of the mountain, keeping in the cover of the valleys as much as possible. Although I could limp painfully along, the red vegetation offered no serious impediment to my progress.

THE low bushes crushed easily underfoot, burdening the air with their unfamiliar pungent odor. The country was rolling, the low hills and level valleys all covered crimson with the scrub, gigantic boulders scattered here and there.

The Silver Lake shimmered in the distance—a bright white metallic sheet.

The gem-capped mountain rose before me until I saw that the gaunt black sides rose a full thousand feet to the crown of blazing crystal. And as I drew nearer I saw that indeed the gems were buildings of a massive, fantastic architecture.

A city of crystal! Prismatic fires of emerald-green and ruby-red and sapphire-blue poured out in a mingled flood of iridescence from its slender spires and great towers, its central ruby dome and the circling battlements of a hundred flashing hues.

CHAPTER III

MELVAR OF ASTRAN

JUST before noon I staggered into a little dell that was covered with unusually profuse growths of the crimson plants. Along a little trickling stream of water they were waist high, bearing abundantly the star-shaped flowers and small golden-brown fruits.

Suddenly there was a rustling in the thicket and the head and shoulders of a young woman rose abruptly out of the red brush. In her hand she held a woven basket, half full of the fruits. In my alarm I had thrown up the rifle. But I soon lowered it and grinned in confusion when I realized that it was a girl, by far the most beautiful I had ever seen.

I have always been awkward in the presence of a beautiful woman and for a few minutes I did nothing but stand and stare at her while her quizzical dark blue eyes inscrutably returned my look.

She was clad in a slight garment, green in color, that seemed to be woven of a fine-spun metal. Her hair was long and golden, fastened behind her shapely head with a circlet—a thin band cut evidently from a single monster ruby. Her features were fine and delicate and she had a surpassing grace of figure.

That her slender arms were stained to the elbows with the red juice of the plants—she had been picking the golden fruits—did not detract from her beauty. I was struck—and, I admit, conquered—by her face. For a little time she stood very erect, looking at me with an odd expression and then she spoke, enunciating the words very carefully, in a rich golden voice.

The language was English!

She said, "Are you—American?"

"At your service," I told her, "Winfield Fowler of White Deer, Texas, and New York City, not to mention other points. But I own to some surprise at finding a knowledge of the idiom in a denizen of so remote a locality."

"I can understand," she smiled. "But I think you could talk—more simply. So you are Winfield, who came with Austen across the great—ocean from America?"

"You guessed it," I said, trying to keep my growing excitement in hand while I marveled at her beauty. "Is mind reading common in these parts?"

"Doctor Austen—the American—told me about you, his friend. And he gave me two books—Tennyson's poems and—'The Pathfinder.'"

"So you have seen Austen?" I cried in real astonishment. "Are you Melvar? Are you the 'maiden of the crystal city'?"

"I am Melvar," she told me. "And Austen stopped in Astran one sutar—that is thirty-six days."

"Where is he now?" I eagerly demanded.

"He was a strange man," the golden voice replied. "He did not fear the Krimlu, as do the men of Astran. He walked off toward the pass in the north that leads around—around the Silver Lake, he called it. He had been watching the Krimlu as they came at night and doing strange things with some stuff he took from the Silver Lake."

"While he was here the hunters brought in one of the"—again she hesitated, at a loss for a word—"the Purple Ones," she concluded. "He took that to examine it."

"What are the Krimlu?" I exclaimed. "What—or who—are the Purple Ones? What is the Silver Lake?"

"You are a man of many questions," she laughed. For a moment she hesitated, her blue eyes resting on my face.

"The Krimlu, so say the old men

of Astran, are the spirits of the dead who come back from the land beyond the Silver Lake to watch the living and to carry off the evil for their food. So the priests taught us and so I believed until Austen came and told me of the world that is beyond."

"He told the Elders of the outer world but they put upon him the curse of the Sun and drove him away. And indeed it is well that he was ready to go so willingly beyond the Silver Lake, for Jorak would have offered him to the Purple Sun had he been in the city another night."

Suddenly she must have become conscious of the intensity of my unthinking gaze, for she abruptly dropped her eyes and flushed a little.

"Go on," I urged. "What about the Purple Ones and the Silver Lake? Your account is certainly entertaining, if somewhat more mystifying than illuminating. At this rate you will have me a raving maniac in an hour but the process is not unpleasant. Proceed."

SHE looked up at me, smiled, looked off to the side, then let her eyes return to mine with curious speculation in them. "What is the Silver Lake?" she went on. "You know as well as I, though Austen tried to find its secret. The touch of its water is death—a death that is terrible."

"And the Purple Ones—you will see them soon enough! They are strange beings who come, no one knows whence, into the land of Astran. The priests tell us that they are the avengers of the Purple Sun—but did you come down the ladder as Austen did?"

"Most of the way in the same manner," I told her. "I finished the descent rather faster than he did, I imagine."

"Is there really," she asked, "a forests that are green and seas of clear blue water and a sun that is broad world beyond with fields and

not purple but white? Such Austen told me but the Elders say that the ladder is the path to the Purple Sun and that beyond is nothing.

"Is it true that there is a great nation of the men of your race, a nation of men who know the art of fire that Austen showed us and greater arts—who can travel in ships over water and through the air like the Krimlu?"

"Yes," I said, "the world is that and more—but in all of it I have never seen a girl as beautiful as you."

It is not my habit to make such speeches to ladies but I was feeling a bit light-headed that morning as a reaction from my terrible adventure—and I was rather intoxicated by her charm.

She smiled, evidently not displeased, and looked away again, composing her expression with difficulty. There was a suspicious twinkle in her dark blue eyes.

"Tell me why you have come into this land," she asked abruptly.

"Austen sent for me to come to his aid," I replied.

"You and Austen are not like the men of Astran," she mused. "Not one of them ever went out to face the Krimlu or even the Purple Ones of his own free will. You must be brave."

"Say ignorant," I said. "Since I have seen the 'Krimlu,' as you call the flying lights, I am about ready to give up courage of any kind."

Then, because my exhausted condition had robbed me of my ordinary sense of responsibility, I did such a thing as I had never dared before. The girl was standing close before me, matchlessly beautiful, infinitely desirable. Her eyes were bright, and the sunlight glistened in her golden hair.

And—well, I admit that I did not try very hard to resist the temptation to kiss her. I felt her arm at my back, a sudden quick thrust of her lithe body. The next I knew

I was lying on my back and she was bending over me with tears in her eyes.

"Oh!" she cried. "I didn't know. Your head! It is bleeding. And your hands and feet! I didn't notice!"

So I was compelled to lie there while the beautiful stranger very tenderly dressed and bandaged the cut on my head. In truth I doubt that I would have been able to get up immediately. The touch of her cool fingers was very light and deft. Once her golden hair brushed against my cheek. Her nearness was very pleasant. I knew that I loved her completely though I had never taken much stock in love at first sight.

Presently she had finished. Then she said, "When Austen gave me the books he left a letter for any man of the outside who might happen to come to Astran. You might come with me to the city to get it—and to rest until you can walk without limping so painfully."

"Then, if you will, you can find Austen. But the Krimlu are mighty. No man of Astran has ever dared oppose them. No man who has ever gone into that accursed region has ever been seen again."

CHAPTER IV

ASTRAN, THE CRYSTAL CITY

THE sun dropped beneath the rim and the purple dusk began to thicken and creep over the valley floor. I took up my precious equipment and Melvar and I walked off through the red brush in the direction of the mountain. The vast strange buildings of the city of gems were still glowing with soft color and the cold bright surface of the Silver Lake flashed often into sight beyond the rolling eminences.

Presently we came to a well-worn

path through the crimson scrub but I saw nothing to indicate that anyone had thought of paving or improving it. The Astranians did not seem to have much energy for any kind of public work. Their material civilization appeared to be on a rather low scale. In fact they supplied their wants in the way of food entirely with the abundant fruit of the red bushes.

As I had guessed from the girl's remarks they did not have even the use of fire. Indeed the great physical and mental development of the race and the splendid city in which it lived were strangely contrasted with their absolute lack of scientific knowledge.

Our pace was hastened by thoughts of the terrors the night would bring. Perhaps because of them we walked nearer to one another and presently we were hurrying along hand in hand. About us the purple night deepened and beyond the argent brilliance of the Silver Sea the strange evil of the darkness gathered itself for the attack.

At last we came to the narrow path that wound up the side of the mountain to the splendid palaces that crowned it. We hurried, came to a great arched gate in the emerald wall, and entered. The huge and incredibly magnificent buildings were scattered irregularly about the summit with broad spaces between them.

Here and there were paved courts of the silvery metal, which must have been an aluminum bronze, but the open ground was for the most part grown up in rank thickets of the red brush. The great buildings showed the wear and breakage of ages. Here and there were great heaps of gleaming crystal, where wonderful edifices had fallen with the brush grown up around them.

Incredible as it may seem I think the old civilization of Astran had possessed a science that was able to synthesize diamonds and other pre-

cious stones in quantities sufficient even for use as building stones. Later I had opportunity to examine bits of the fallen masonry.

Towering above all, on the very peak of the mountain, was a great ruby dome, vast as the dome of St. Peter's. Mounted upon the center of the top was a huge machine that resembled nothing so much as a great naval gun though it was made of crystal and white metal.

A little group of men were gathered about it and as I watched they swung the great tube about and a narrow ray of pale blue light poured out of it. Down on the plain below, where the practise beam had struck, a great boulder flashed into sudden incandescence.

In their exploration of the ultra-violet spectrum our own scientists have found rays that are strangely destructive to life and considerable progress has been made in the development of a destructive beam of wireless energy. But later I was to meet a far more terrible ray weapon than that slender blue beam.

"With that," said Melvar, "our people fight off the Krimlu at night. But the Krimlu are so many that sometimes they are able to land and take our people. If only we had more of the beams!

"But there is no man in all Astran who knows how the light is made—or anything save that the blue light shines out to destroy when rock of a certain kind is put into the tube. Austen wished to examine it and spoke of something he called 'radium ore' but the priests forbade. Indeed, his curiosity is one of the reasons Jorak had for driving him away."

Standing about the ill-kept streets were a few of the people of the crystal city. All were of magnificent physique and intelligent looking, white-skinned and fair haired. All wore garments that seemed of spun metal and bore gleaming crystal weapons.

Most of them were hurrying along,

intent on affairs of their own, but a few gathered around us almost as soon as we stepped in the gate. I felt that they were hostile to me. They questioned Melvar in a tongue that was strange to my ears—then became engaged in a noisy debate among themselves. Their glances toward me were furtive and sullen and their eyes had the look of men crazed by fear.

MELVAR was saying something in a conciliatory tone and I was swinging my rifle into position for use when there was a sudden shout from the gate of the city and the clashing of crystal weapons. The interruption was most welcome to me. The crowd turned eagerly to the new arrivals.

I saw that they were a band of soldiers, possibly the same that had passed me in the morning. Slung to a pole carried between the foremost two was a strange thing. Weirdly colored and fearfully mutilated as it was I saw that it was the naked body of a human being.

The head was cut half off and dangling at a grotesque angle. The hair was very long and very white, flying in loose disorder. The features were withered and wrinkled, indeed the whole form was incredibly emaciated. It was the corpse of a woman. The flesh was deep purple!

As I stood staring at the thing in horror there was laughter and cheering in the crowd and a little child ran up to stab at the thing with a miniature diamond sword. Melvar touched my arm.

"Come quickly," she whispered. "The people do not like your coming. They did not like the things Austen told of the world outside, for the priests teach that there is no such world. It is well that the hunters came when they did with the Purple One. And let us hope that the priests of the Purple Sun do not hear of you."

As she spoke she steered me rapid-

ly away through a tangle of the red brush and through a colonnade of polished sapphire. Then she quickly led the way along a deserted alley, across another patch of the red shrubbery and down a short flight of steps into a chamber that was dark.

"Wait here," she commanded. "I must leave you. I think that Jorak has had spies upon me and if I were too long absent he might grow suspicious. He was the enemy of my father and some day my brother will slay him. Sometimes I am afraid of the way he looks at me.

"However there is no danger now. If the priests hear, I will somehow get you out of Astran. I think they will not seek you here, whatever may happen. My brother will bring the message from Austen and food and drink. May you rest well and have faith in me!"

She ran up the steps and left me standing in the darkness in a state of uncomfortable indecision. I did not like the turn that affairs had taken.

It is never pleasant to be alone in the dark in a strange and dangerous place.

I would have much preferred to take my chances out on the open plain with nothing but the moving lights to fear, terrible as they were, than here in this strange city, full of ill-disposed savages.

A diamond knife will kill a man just as effectively and completely as the weirdest death that ever roamed the night.

For a time I stood waiting tensely, my rifle in my hand, but I was very tired and weak. Presently I got out my flashlight and examined the place. It was a little cell, apparently hewn in the living rock of the mountain. There was nothing in the way of furniture except a sort of padded shelf or bed at the back. I sat down upon it and presently went to sleep there, though I had no intention of doing so.

THE next I knew someone was shaking my arm and shouting strange words in my ear. I opened my eyes. Standing before me was a young man. In one hand he held a crystal globe, filled with a glowing phosphorescent stuff, faintly lighting the little apartment. I sat up slowly, for my limbs were stiff. The gun was still in my hand.

Without saying anything more the young fellow pointed to a tray that he had set by me on the shelf. It contained a crystal pitcher of aromatic liquid and a dash of the yellow fruit. I gulped down some of the drink and ate a few of the fruits, feeling refreshed almost immediately.

Then the boy—he was not more than sixteen years of age—thrust into my hand an envelope addressed in the familiar handwriting of Austen. He handed me the light and walked up the stone stairs.

With feeling that well may be imagined I tore open the envelope and read, in the faint light of the glowing bulb, the words of my old friend.

To whomsoever of my own race this may be delivered—

Since you must so far have traveled the mysterious dangers of this strange world it is needless for me to dwell upon them. I write this brief missive for the information of anyone who shall happen to find the way here in the future and in order that the riddle of my own disappearance may some time be cleared up if I fail to return. For I intend to explore the region beyond this lake—I call it the Silver Lake—or to lose my life in the attempt.

My name is Horace Austen. I came to the Great Victoria Desert to investigate the sculptured columns reported by Hamilton, far to the west of here. I found the ruins and incredibly ancient they are. They must date from fifty thousand years ago at the latest.

Among them was an amazing pictographical record of a race of men, driven by the drying up of their country to emigrate to the crater of a great mountain nearby. There was no mistaking the meaning. I was, of course, intensely interested, for nothing of the kind had ever been reported in Australia and certainly the people depicted were not Bushmen.

It happened that I remembered Wellington's account of the Mountain of the Moon, whose northern cliff was followed for a few miles by his route of 1887. That appeared to be the best chance for the great crater described on the columns. It was but natural for me to decide to investigate it. There is no use for me to dwell upon my hardships but the last of my water was drunk when I found the ladder, which was located just as the inscriptions indicated.

I reached the red plain without accident and found the fruit of the strange vegetation a palatable and nourishing food. So far I have escaped the red lights that haunt the night and it is their mystery that I am determined to solve. I went down to the metallic lake and investigated it.

I confess myself quite unable to account either for the nature or for the incredible origin of the fluid. With proper precaution it can be studied without great difficulty but since I am almost entirely without apparatus I have learned little enough about it.

I had been in the crater a week when I decided to approach the city of jewels on the mountain. I have been in Astran over a month but on account of the savagery and ignorance of the people and the oppressive rule of the priesthood I have not been on very friendly relations with Melvar, who seems far above the others of her race and who has been my friend from the first.
them—with the exception of the girl,

I have been able to learn but little from them although I have acquired a fair knowledge of the language. My instructor, the beautiful Melvar, is showing a keen desire to learn English, of which she is gaining command with remarkable speed.

She is developing as well an insatiable curiosity about the outer world.

The sentiment against me has been ever running higher and tomorrow I shall leave the crystal city and endeavor to round the sea in the north and to reach the mist-veiled land beyond. My only regret in leaving is that I shall see Melvar no more. I wish there were some way to secure for her the advantages of a civilized education.

These may be my last words to the world, if indeed they ever come into the hands of a civilized man. But I know that sooner or later the crater will be discovered and entered. My chief purpose in writing this, aside from the satisfaction of leaving an account of my own doings, is to state my firm belief, I may say my certain knowledge, that the strange things that may be observed here, supernatural or incredible as they may appear, result from perfectly natural forces in the control of a civilized power that may not be much above our own advancements.

Horace Austen.

CHAPTER V

FOWLER RECOVERS

I READ it in the faint glow of the phosphorescent globe, then read it again. So Austen was beyond the crescent if he had been able to carry out his plan. The date of the letter was ten months back. Then the radio message had probably come from the other side. And why had it been sent?

Austen was not one to appeal for aid for himself alone. Had he feared some general danger to the human race? I thought of his phrase "for the sake of mankind" and shuddered at a picture of the red lights sweeping like destroying angels over a great city like New York, decimating the terrorized population.

I tried to think what was best for me to do if ever I got out of Astran alive. I supposed that Austen had been able to round the Silver Lake in the north. I should be able to follow him. Clearly there was nothing for me to do but to find out as much about this strange world as possible and to get the equipment to him as soon as I could do so.

I stayed in the cellar-like home for a week. Twice each day the young chap came to bring food and drink. He knew but a few words of English and during the hour or so he stayed each time I had him try teaching me the language of Astran. But my progress was slow, and I never learned more than a few score words. The language seemed much more complex than English, with bewildering rules of inflection.

But I developed quite a liking for the boy. He had a simple straightforward manner and a good sense of humor. His name was Naro. He was the brother of Melvar and was two years younger. Their father, it seemed, had been carried off several years before when the flying lights made a great raid and the mother had soon after fallen a victim to the sacrificial rites of the hated Jorak.

The boy himself bore the scars of wounds he had suffered a few months earlier in a terrific battle with one of the Purple Ones, as those monsters were called, which so mystified me then and with which I had such terrible experiences later.

On the second day Melvar came. She brought a great flask of aromatic oil that she poured over my wounds. It must have been remarkably healing for in a few days I

found myself entirely recovered. Before she left she told me that the priests had heard of my arrival and that it was whispered among the people that I was a supernatural being, sent as an omen of an attack by the Krimlu.

She told me too that there was talk of a sacrifice soon to be offered at the altar of the Purple Sun to appease the angry Spirits of the dead. Sweet and innocent child, she seemed to have no fear that she, who had brought me into the city, would be the sacrifice. I did nothing to let her know my misgivings although I did propose that we leave the city together as soon as possible. How I hated to see her leave the apartment!

During the following days I questioned Naro constantly as to the doings of his sister and of the Astranians. But I was able to elicit no very satisfactory information except that none of the Krimlu had been seen for several days and that the headmen of the nation were beginning to expect a raid in force.

Also I persuaded him to keep a very close watch on the movements of Melvar and to come to me at once if Jorak made any attempt to get her into his power or if the sacrificial ceremony was begun with the victim unselected.

During the interminable periods when I was alone I was driven almost insane by the monotony and anxiety of my existence. But I had my scientific equipment and I had the boy bring me a few assorted fragments of the crystal building stones, which I tested and found to be real gems of several varieties. Many gems are simple enough in chemical formula and composed of the most common elements, so the synthesis of them by scientific means is not unreasonable.

For example it is a well-known fact that diamond is just a crystal form of carbon, which element occurs in three allotropic forms. Those

three forms are diamond, graphite—which also crystallizes—and amorphous carbon, of which charcoal is a form. Since carbon occurs in the air in carbon dioxide it is not impossible that latterday science should be able to manufacture diamonds from the air.

Sapphires are aluminum oxide or alumina, colored with a little cobalt, and rubies are composed of the same oxide with a trace of chromium, to which the color is due. A clay-bed would supply an inexhaustible amount of the elements needed for the synthesis of these gems and I think the people of old Astran had been able to accomplish it.

I examined the little glow-lamp too and found it to be simply a crystal bottle filled with the moist crushed leaves of the red plants, which formed a culture of some kind of luminous bacteria.

ON THE seventh night, when the pale ray of daylight that filtered down into my hiding place was dimmed, Naro burst into the chamber, panting and wild-eyed with terror. His crystal sword was gone, his metallic mangle was torn and blood was falling drop by drop from a deep scratch on his arm.

He thrust into my hand a tattered scrap of paper, evidently the flyleaf of a book. On it, in an ink that I took at first to be blood although it was probably the juice of the red plants, the following words were formed in hastily drawn printing characters—

Winfield, There is no hope. The priests will offer a gift to the Purple Sun. I am the victim. Already I am in the hands of Jorak. I am sorry, for I loved you. It may be that I can give this to Naro, who will take it to you.

The Krimlu are coming tonight. Already their lights flicker above the mist. In the morning my brother will take you to the gate and you

may escape. If only it had been one night later we might have all been away together. Farewell.

Melvar.

No time was to be lost. I had been anticipating something of the kind. My guns were cleaned and loaded. My pack was soon ready. Naro took a part of my equipment. I followed the boy up the stair with the phrase "for I loved you" ringing in my heart.

We reached the top and walked out into the red brush. Beneath the purple starlight the vast fantastic columned halls of Astran were gleaming faintly. I caught a brief blue flicker from the great machine on the ruby dome.

Suddenly, with a sharp thrill of terror that made me catch my breath, I heard a distant whining sigh that grew until it rolled and reverberated through the heavens and the air seemed alive with its deep intensity. Above the emerald wall I glimpsed the green-tipped needle of crimson that made the sound.

It was sweeping through the sky, meteor-swift, while the pale blue beam stabbed out at it ineffectually. It passed in an instant but others came and soon the sky was lighted with the weird red radiance. The very mountaintop vibrated with the whistling roars. The things swept around and around in a mad confusion of darting flames. They were like moths about a candle.

We passed an amber palace and came suddenly upon a great metal-floored court. Marching across it were a half-score of the Astranian men-at-arms, their accoutrements gleaming weirdly in the light of the strange things above. They saw us at once, and charged upon us with a shout.

I dropped to my knees. Once my rifle spoke and I rejoiced at its heavy thrust against my shoulder and the acrid odor of the smoke. I felt a

man again. And the leader of the soldiers fell upon his face.

Naro gripped my shoulder and pointed upward. One of the red things was plunging down like a great red Zeppelin with a great green light at its forward end, its purple phosphorescent track swirling up behind it. The soldiers forgot us and scattered in mad terror. Naro jerked my arm and we tumbled into a cove of the red brush.

For a moment the bloody radiance was thrown upon us in an intense flood and the screaming roar was deafening. A few moments more and the thing had flashed up and away. A breath of hot purple mist passed over us. When we got to our feet and crept out of the thicket the soldiers were gone.

Swiftly Naro led me on, keeping in the shadows of the buildings or in the cover of the thickets. Once a man sprang suddenly at us from behind a sapphire pillar, diamond sword drawn. My pistol exploded in his face and blew his head half off.

Naro possessed himself of the dead man's weapons and we went breathlessly on. Three times in other parts of the city we saw the red shapes drop to the ground briefly, then dart up again while ever the blue ray played hack and forth upon them.

AT LAST we passed between vast ruby columns and stood beneath the huge red dome. Before us lay a great space, fairly lit with a rosy light from the crystal walls. Around the farther side were seated, tier upon tier, thousands of the brilliantly clad people of Astran.

In the center of the great floor, resting upon a pedestal, was a globe of shining purple—a sphere of coruscating flame—itself immense, perhaps forty feet in diameter, but insignificant in that colossal hall. Standing at rigid attention in regular rows about the pedestal were a few score bright-armed soldiers and as many other erect men in long

purple robes. All eyes were fixed on a point in front of the gigantic globe bidden from where we stood.

We hurried silently across the smooth metal floor, our footsteps drowned in the rushing sounds of the flying things above. We ran around the great purple sun-sphere of crystal and came abruptly upon a dramatically terrible scene. Beneath the sphere was an altar of glowing red with the priests and soldiery all grouped about it.

By the altar, kneeling and silent, clad in a filmy green robe, was the beautiful form of Melvar. Just behind her stood a tall hawk-like man, in his hands a great transparent crystal vessel full of a liquid that gleamed like molten silver.

As we came around the sphere he was holding up the vessel and repeating a strange chant in a monotonous monotone. At sight of us he dropped into alarmed silence, with an ugly scowl of hate and fear distorting his harsh features. For a moment he stood as if paralyzed, then he rushed toward the silent girl as though to empty the contents of the crystal pitcher upon her.

I fired on the instant and had the luck to shatter the vessel, splashing the shining silvery fluid all over his person. The effect of it was instantaneous and terrible. His purple robe was eaten away and set on fire by the stuff. His flesh was dyed a deep purple and partially consumed. He tottered and fell to the floor in a writhing flaming heap.

In the confusion and dazed silence that fell upon the vast assemblage at sight of that horrible thing Melvar, aroused from her resignation of despair by the report of the pistol, sprang to her feet in incredulous surprise. For a moment she looked wonderingly at us. Then she turned and shouted a few strange and impressive words at the priests. Her white arms swept up in a curious gesture.

She turned and sped toward us.

We started running back the way we had come. The dramatic fall of Jorak and the evident terror that Melvar's courageous and timely words, whatever they were, had inspired served to hold the Astranians motionless until we had traversed the better part of the distance to the columns.

But then they started after us en masse. I dropped to my knees by the columns and began firing steadily with the rifle. They fell, sometimes two or three at a shot, but still they charged on and their number was overwhelming.

Then, outside, there was a sudden louder shrieking roar. A flood of red light poured through the columns and there was a terrific crash upon the dome. Dense clouds of hot purple vapor poured into the vast room. One of the flying lights had landed upon the roof. The charging throng behind us stopped and ran about in confusion.

We darted out through the purple clouds and ran for the shadow of the nearest building. We kept close by the mighty walls until we reached the gate. Daring the terrors of the night we ran out and down the narrow trail. By dawn we were several miles from Astran in the direction of the shining lake.

CHAPTER VI

THE SILVER LAKE

AT THE coming of day we were walking over a gently rolling scarlet plain, scattered with gigantic solitary boulders that sloped gradually down to the Silver Lake. The lake lay flat and argent white, clad in all the ominous mystery of that strange world, calling, beckoning us on, challenging us to learn the secret of the farthest bank of purple fog with a grim warning of the doom

that might await us.

The red fern-like sprays waved gently in the breeze and the vivid tiny white flowers seemed to sparkle with a million glancing rays like frost in the sunshine. But the deep intensity of the red color lent a weird and unpleasant suggestion of blood. Beyond the Silver Lake low hills rose, faint and mysterious in the purple haze.

Melvar walked beside me when the way was smooth enough. She was talking vivaciously. She had a keen sense of humor and a lively wit. She seemed to have an almost childishly perfect faith in my power and that of my guns—but I was far from feeling confident.

At sunrise we stopped by a little pool of clear water.

We drank and made a meal of the abundant yellow fruit. Astran, with the scintillating fires kindled again in its jeweled towers by the rising Sun, lay far behind and above us. When we had finished eating Melvar stood looking for a long moment at its glorious sparkling light. She murmured a few words beneath her breath in the Astranian tongue and turned again toward the Silver Lake.

In two hours we came to the shore of the great lake. The red scrub grew up to the brink of a bluff a dozen feet high. Below was a broad bare sandy beach with the gleaming waves, quicksilver white, rolling on it two hundred yards away.

For a few minutes we stood at the edge of the cliff in the fringe of crimson brush and let our eyes wander over the vast flat desert of flowing argent fire. We peered at the misty red hills beyond, trying to penetrate their mysteries and to read what lay behind them. Then we scrambled down on the hard white sand. Naro grasped his weapon and looked up and down the beach.

"It is along the shore of the Silver Lake," Melvar said, "that the Purple Ones are most frequently found."

"The Purple Ones, again!" I cried. "What are they—decorated rattlesnakes?" Then, with a sickening sensation of terror, I remembered the horrible half-human purple corpse that I had seen the soldiers bringing into Astran. "Are the Purple Ones men?"

"In form they are men and women," Melvar said, "but they dwell alone in the thickets like beasts. All of them are old and hideous. They are savage and they each have the strength of many men. Our soldiers must always hunt them and fight them to the death.

"A single man, even though armed, could do nothing against one of them for they are terribly strong and they fight like demons. Their country is not known and no children of their kind are ever found. The priests say that they are of a race of dwarfs that dwell beneath the Silver Lake."

Here was another of the baffling mysteries of this strange world. In fact I was coming upon unpleasant mysteries much faster than I could comfortably stomach them. Lone purple savage animals, in the form of emaciated humans, who prowled the country like wolves and like wolves were hunted down by the Astranians!

Again I shuddered at the memory of the limp purple corpse the soldiers had carried and with a strange chill of the heart, I remembered the human footprints that had been left where my ponies were taken in the desert and the eerie insane laughter that I had heard, or thought I heard, above the whistling roar.

My thoughts ended with the construction of a mad hypothesis of a race of purple folk who lived beyond the Silver Lake, who were accustomed to make slave raids on the whites in torpedo-shaped airships and who made a practise of releasing or turning out the superannuated ones of their kind to prey on the people of the crystal city.

It seemed, in fact, quite plausible at the time but I was far from the hideous truth. I could see no reason, if one race could attain a civilization high enough to synthesize diamonds for building-stone, why another might not be able to build ships as marvelous as the red torpedoes. But my reason rebelled at the acceptance of the ideas of demonic and supernatural horrors my emotional self tried to force upon it.

PRESENTLY I roused myself and I led the way down the white waves. My companions held back nervously and warned me not to touch them lest I die as Jorak had. But I succeeded in filling a test tube with the stuff. It was not transparent. It was white, gleaming, metallic, like mercury or molten silver.

I carried it back up to the bluff and set about examining it while Naro stood guard and Melvar watched me. She asked innumerable questions, concerning not only the operation in hand but on such subjects as the appearance of a cat and Fifth Avenue styles of ladies' garments. Upon which latter, however, I was lamentably ignorant.

So often did I pause to answer her questions, to laugh at the naive quaintness of her phrases or to let my eyes rest on her charming face, that the attempted analysis of the metal did not progress with any remarkable celerity.

The silver liquid was very mobile and very light, having a specific gravity of only .25 or not even four times that of liquid hydrogen, which is .07. It was extremely corrosive. Tiny bits of wood or paper were entirely consumed on contact with it with the liberation, apparently, of carbon dioxide and water vapor and a dense purple gas that I could not identify.

That suggested, of course, that the stuff contained oxygen but as to how

much or in what combination I had no idea. A drop of it on a larger piece of paper set it afire. I found too, when testing the electrolytic qualities of the liquid, that when I introduced into it a copper and a silver coin, electrically connected, the stuff was rapidly decomposed into the purple vapor with the generation of a powerful current.

But the metal seemed not affected at all. That was another puzzling result. My experiments, of course, were comparatively crude and when I had gone as far as I could I really knew little more about the silver liquid than in the beginning.

Despite Melvar's warning and my own precautions I splashed a drop of it on my arm. She cried out in horror and I saw that a splotch of purple was spreading like a thin film over the skin. There was no pain but the muscles of the arm were seized with sudden uncontrollable convulsions. Melvar tried to wash the stain off with water from my canteen. In an hour the color had faded though the limb was still sore and painful.

By that time the purple disc of the Sun was sinking low and we took thought of how to spend the night. Naro climbed up on the plain to gather a few of the fruits for our supper and we found a little cave in the bluff that seemed a good place of shelter. I gathered an armful of the red brush and made a fire.

The leaves burned fiercely, crackling as if they contained oil. The fire produced a great volume of acrid black smoke. Combustion was greatly accelerated on account of the increased atmospheric pressure here, many thousand feet below sea level. Melvar and Naro were intensely interested in the performance although they had seen Austen light a fire while he was in the city.

Melvar slept in the cavern and Naro and I took turns standing guard at the entrance. The darting pencils of crimson were abroad again

but they passed far overhead and we heard the sounds of their passage only as vast and distant sighs.

In the morning we rose early, and clambered back up the cliffs. I was in rather a puzzling situation. Clearly my duty was to get Austen's equipment to him as quickly as possible but I liked neither to desert Melvar and her brother nor to let them accompany me into the unknown perils of the region beyond. But the latter course seemed the best and they were ready enough to go with me anywhere.

HAVING retraced our course of the day before for perhaps a mile in order to get upon the upland, we set out for the north. The Sun was just rising above the black rim when Naro shouted and pointed at the mist-clad red hills beyond the Silver Lake. At first I looked in vain. Then I caught a faint flicker of amber light, pulsing up through the purple air.

Abruptly a vast mellow golden beam sprang from behind the distant scarlet hills and spread up toward the zenith in a deep yellow flood. It seemed to vibrate, to throb with incredibly rapid fluctuations. Suddenly, bright swift-changing formless shapes of green and red flared up within it, shot up the beam and vanished. The radiance dimmed and died.

I could see nothing but somehow I felt that an invisible beam of vibrant force was still pouring up into the sky. Here was another manifestation of the unknown power beyond the sea. The beam had come. So far as visibility was concerned it was gone. What had been its meaning, its purpose?

Beyond the Silver Lake low cliffs rose above a broad sandy beach, faintly veiled by the purple mist. The red hills were fainter still above them and the thicker pall of purple haze that hung over the hidden place beyond stood out distinctly against

the distant steep black wall that threw its jagged crags to the sky so far above. Out of that vale of mystery the ray had leapt—and died. Or had it merely faded to be now invisible—but pulsing still?

All seemed as it had been before but from the attitude of my companions I knew there was more to come. They were gazing up into the Sun-bright void above and waiting expectantly.

Then I saw, far, far above, growing gradually brighter against the sky as if it were being projected there by a great magic lantern behind the hills, an upright bar of silver haze.

Slowly it grew brighter and its outlines sharper until it looked like a vertical bar of silver metal in the sky—inconceivably huge. The length of the bar must have been miles, its diameter many hundreds of yards. It hung still in the heavens, neither rising nor falling. Here was a display indeed of alien science and power!

Presently I recovered from my first wonder and became conscious that the blue eyes of Melvar were upon me quite as much as on the astonishing thing in the sky.

"Melvar, have you seen it before?" I asked. "Is it real—natural? Is it made by man?" I found to my surprise that my voice was odd and quavery. I had not realized the intensity of my nervous strain. I waited eagerly for the reassurance that she could not give.

"It comes often," she replied. "Every day for many months of the year. The priests say that it is the evil goddess of the under-earth, who loves the Purple Sun and flies to the sky to meet him. But the Sun goes on unheeding and the goddess cries silver tears until her Lord is gone from the sky. But there is yet more to see."

I looked up again and saw that a faint colored mist was gathering about the bar. It grew brighter,

condensed, seemed drawn into swirling rings by a sort of magnetic attraction. And the iridescent mist-rings swam about the bar, moved ever faster until they were whirling madly.

Their coruscating shapes grew brighter, plainer, until they were vivid, spinning flames of color in the sunshine. I noticed that the red was about the center of the silver bar and that the bands of color above and below ran regularly to the other end of the spectrum, with rings of violet at the bottom and at the top. During all this time I heard no sound. It was as still as death.

Still the color-rings spun and changed, growing ever brighter and sharper edged. The red band grew larger about the center until its diameter was the length of the cylinder. It gleamed with a lurid scarlet light. Below and above were spinning burning circles of orange, yellow, green and blue, each thinner than the one next nearer the center and of smaller diameter. The violet rings had shrunk to great globes of violet fire, shining with painful intensity.

INDEED, as Melvar had said, there was more to see. The phenomenon was so utterly strange, so utterly inexplicable, that I was grasped in a paralysis of unfamiliar terror. My breath was choked and my heart beat wild with fear as I stared straight at it. It was so definitely directed by intelligence that I felt it must spring from a weird and awful mind.

Indeed it seemed that I felt the power of a vast and alien will stealing over me, seizing command of me, making me the slave of itself. I struggled against it. I clenched my hands and knotted my muscles with the intensity of my resistance to the spell. Wheeling sparks of red fire swam before my eyes.

Then my efforts weakened. I could hold out no longer. The alien will

had won. Reason and feeling and love flowed away and left me as cold and cruel as a rock in a stormy wintry coast—a savage inhuman animal. Care had left me. My soul had lost her throne. I laughed. A wild unearthly sound it was, like that I had heard as I lay beneath the tent beyond the harrier.

I whirled around fiercely but a firm arresting hand was laid on my shoulder. From afar off deep blue eyes looked into mine—eyes that were cool and sane and brave. They shone through the red curtains of insanity in my brain. They broke the spell of fear.

Suddenly I was weak and trembling and sick. Melvar's lithe arms were close about me. Her throbbing heart was close to mine. And in her dark warm blue eyes, so close to mine, were sympathy and tenderness and love. She was human—she was real. I knew that her love would shield me from these terrors. I smiled at her, and sank down weakly in the red hush. But she had saved my mind. I had wandered on the brink of the fearful insanity of terror and she had brought me back.

I looked from her sweet face, so full of anxious concern, to the thing in the sky. But now it seemed remote, unreal, and I gazed at it with indifference. Presently I saw that the whole thing was beginning to sink as though a weight were being accumulated upon it. Suddenly an immense gleaming globule of silver fell from the lower violet globe and dropped straight for the Silver Lake while the weird form of lights that had made it floated back to its former elevation. The great shining sphere fell and struck the white lake with a deafening roar, sending out great concentric waves in all directions.

The amazing phenomenon sank again, released a second huge drop and rose. The process was repeated again and again, the interval being about 3 minutes, 15.2 seconds by my

watch. All day it went on, the great waves washing against the bluffs above the beach. By nightfall the level of the Silver Lake stood perceptibly higher.

Here was the mystery of the origin of the Silver Lake explained but by a phenomenon more inexplicable than the sea itself. In vain I tried to account for it in some rational way or to assign some natural cause for the thing. My mind could hardly grasp it. It was almost unbelievable even as I looked upon it. My reason would not admit that such a thing could be in a rational world.

CHAPTER VII

STALKED BY THE PURPLE BEAST

SO WEAK was I after that terrible experience that it was noon before I felt able to go on. The phenomenon, as I have said, continued to stand in the sky all day and drop regularly its burden of silver liquid. But presently I became accustomed to it and realized that it threatened us with no immediate danger.

After a light lunch of the yellow fruit and a deep draught of water from a little stream that ran almost parallel to our route of march for a mile or two, we retired to the higher ground where the scrub was not so dense as in the bottom of the valley and set out for the north again. Still I was feeling mentally limp—dully indifferent to what was passing about—and physically exhausted as well. I was not as much on my guard against the weird perils surrounding us as I should have been.

Several times Naro stopped and listened, declaring that something was following us, keeping in the cover of waist-high brush in the bottom of the little valley along the side of which we were traveling.

But I could hear nothing.

Melvar, for once, had ceased her eager interrogation and was entertaining me with the legendary account of the past great heroes of Astran. She sang me a few passages from the epic in her native tongue. Her voice was clear and pure and very beautiful.

And though the words were strange to me, their sound was noble and suggestive, and there was a powerful compelling rhythm in the lines. She translated the story into English. It was about such an epic poem as might have been expected, dealing with the adventures of an immortal hero, who had once conquered the Purple Ones, set up the vast palaces of Astran and at last lost his life on an expedition across the Silver Lake to battle the Krimlu.

Suddenly her sweet voice was interrupted by a low cry from Naro, who had fiercely gripped my arm. I turned in time to see a weird figure, gnarled and stooped and with long white hair, slink swiftly and furtively from a great rock to the shelter of the red brush. Squat and bent as it was there was no mistaking that it was human in shape and that the skin was purple.

In the dull apathy in which I was sunken I could not realize the danger. "I guess a rifle bullet will fix it," I said.

"The Purple Ones have more power than you know," cried Melvar. "Let us try to get on more open ground before it attacks. Then it will have to leave its cover."

So we turned and ran away from the stream to a rocky hillside, where the red scrub grew low and scant. As we ran I heard a crashing behind us. Once I turned quickly and raised my rifle. The strange figure darted abruptly into view and I fired on the instant.

I think I hit it, for it spun around quickly, and fell to the ground. But in a moment it was up and running toward us with an agility that was

incredible, springing over the red brush in great bounds with a motion more like that of a monstrous hopping insect than of a human being.

His white hair was flying in wild disorder, his shrunken limbs plainly flashing purple. And a terrible sound came from it as it bounded along—not a scream of rage or of pain but a weird uncanny laugh that rang strangely over the red plain and made us pause in our race and tremble with alien terror.

But we broke the icy fingers of fear that gripped our hearts and ran on until we reached a great flat rock that lay at the upper edge of the bare space, in the rim of the thickets. I lifted Melvar in my arms until she could reach the top and scramble up. When I looked back I saw the purple man leaping across the clearing with incredible speed, not two hundred yards away.

THEN Naro and I got up on that rock—I have never been able to remember just how we did it. I drowned to my knees, seized the rifle that I had pushed up before me and began to pump lead at the beast as fast as I could work the bolt.

The recoils of the gun seemed almost a steady thrust. I heard the bullets thud into the purple body. I saw it checked or driven back by the impacts. One bullet took it off its balance and it fell. But in a moment it was racing on again, empowered by superhuman energy.

When my rifle was empty it was not twenty feet away. One arm was gone. One side of the body was fearfully torn. The purple face was a hideous mangled thing. It did not bleed but the wounds were covered with a purple viscous slime. One of the eyes was gone and the other glared at us with a wild red light. Anything of ordinary life must long since have been dead. But it gathered itself and leapt for the top of the boulder.

On the day before I had showed

Melvar how to use my guns, merely by way of proof that there was nothing supernatural in the working of the weapon that had slain so many of the Astranians in the temple. Now I pushed one of the pistols toward her. She was standing there motionless. There was no panic in her face and I knew that she would have the courage to use the weapon to save herself from the terrible brute if things came to the worst. She smiled at me even as she picked up the gun. Then, looking at the safety, she gripped it in a businesslike way.

As the purple monster sprang upon the boulder I emptied my automatic into it. Great wounds were torn in the dark flesh and half the face was shot away but the thing seemed immune to death by ordinary means. As the last shot was fired it stood before us on the rock, a terrible mangled thing, its one red eye blazing with demonic inhumanity.

Naro sprang out before me, his crystal sword raised high. As the beast sprang at him he cut at it with a mighty sweep of the razor-edged weapon. But the stroke, which would have decapitated an ordinary human, was parried by a terrific blow of the claw-like hand of the thing and the boy was sent spinning back against me. We fell together on the rock.

Then it hurried itself toward Melvar. It all happened in the briefest of moments before I could even begin to rise. She swung up the automatic with a quick graceful movement. She was like a beautiful goddess of battle, blue eyes shining brightly, golden hair gleaming in the sun.

Again that mad laugh was ringing out with a choking sob in it, for the thing's vocal organs were injured. It leapt at her, its lacerated limbs working like machinery. Calmly she stood, with automatic raised. The muzzle of the gun was not an inch from the throat of the beast when she fired.

The strange head was blown completely off the body, and fell rolling and bouncing to the red brush below. The body collapsed, writhing and convulsed. It was not quiet for many minutes.

The girl dropped the gun, suddenly trembling, and threw herself into my arms, sobbing uncontrollably. Her courage and coolness had saved us all and I admit that I was quite as much unstrung as she after the danger had passed. What a wonderful being she was!

IT WAS so late in the day and we were so completely exhausted that we decided to go no farther. Naro was not hurt save for a few scratches and I suppose he was the least excited of the three. In a few minutes he threw the quivering purple body off the boulder and carried it and the head back across the clearing to dispose of them.

When he returned we found an overhanging shelf on the north side of the boulder that would afford some shelter from the flying lights. We gathered some of the yellow fruit for supper, cleaned and reloaded the weapons and prepared to spend the night there.

Naro called me aside and showed me a curious much-worn silver bracelet with a singular design upon it. He told me in his imperfect English that it had belonged to his father, who had been taken by the flying lights many years before. This was a curious development. It showed that there was some connection between the dreaded Purple Ones and the terrible pillaging red lights. But the full significance of it did not dawn upon me until later.

By that time I was in a measure accustomed to the passage of the whistling needles of crimson fire and during the first part of the night I was able to sleep while Naro sat up to keep watch. At midnight he awakened me, and we changed places.

The sky was crossed and recrossed by the faint and flickering tracks of red and the night was weirdly lit by the torpedo-shades of scarlet flame that sped upon them. With a fatuous sense of security I was leaning back against the boulder, smoking my pipe and caressing the cold metal of the rifle in my hand, dreaming of what Melvar and I might do if ever we were to emerge into the world alive.

The red thing was upon me before I knew it. The light of my pipe must have been visible to it. In my accused thoughtlessness that danger had never occurred to me. The thing came plunging down, flooding the landscape with its lurid crimson radiance while the earth vibrated to its whistling, hissing scream.

There was no need to waken my companions for they sprang to their feet in alarm. We all cowered back against the rock in the hope of escaping observation. But the thing had already seen us. I put my arm about the warm, throbbing body of Melvar and drew her close to my breast. Her cool white hand grasped mine as silently we waited.

The red object came down swiftly, paused just above the crimson thickets before us, then settled deliberately to earth. It was the first opportunity I had had for a close examination of these things. Their shape was plainly cylindrical, tapering toward the ends. It was perhaps ten feet in diameter and a hundred long. Set on the forward end was a bright green globe, some three feet in diameter.

A clump of brush about the end of the cylinder burst into flame. As the bright crimson hue began to dull I suddenly grasped the fact that the red color was due to the red heat generated by friction with the air, which was very great at the meteor pace the thing attained.

It lay there not fifty yards away, with the fire blazing and crackling about the end of our right, eating

its way into the thickets. The green sphere on the other end seemed to stare at us like a great intent eye. The red color slowly faded. Suddenly Melvar gripped my arm.

"Why wait?" she whispered. "Perhaps it does not see us after all. Let's slip around the boulder."

But the instant we moved a great oval space swung out of the side of the cylinder. We saw that the door and walls were of a bluish white metal and were very thick. It was very dark inside. A blood-congealing eerie laugh sounded out of that darkness and I shuddered. Quickly five human-like figures leaped one by one out of the oval doorway.

With heart-chilling fear I saw by the flickering light of the burning thicket that long white hair hung about faces wrinkled and hideously aged, faces with toothless mouths, red glaring eyes and skin that was purple. Without a moment's hesitation the five naked monsters rushed down upon us.

The fire was fast blazing higher, burning rapidly into the brush between us and the cylinder, and we could see the purple beasts quite plainly in its light. And they were hideous to look upon. They came toward us with monstrous springing bounds, actuated by some extraordinary force.

Their muscles must have been far stronger than those of men, perhaps as strong as those of insects. Or, since muscular force depends on the intensity of nerve currents, perhaps their nerves were extraordinarily excited. And there was something insect-like in the way life had lingered in the body of the one we had killed when it had already many wounds that should have been mortal.

I leveled my rifle, drew a bead on the neck of the foremost one and fired. I must have had the luck to shatter the bones for the bead dropped limply to the side. The thing stopped abruptly, groping blindly

about with its talon-like fingers. It seemed very strange that it did not fall.

In an instant one of the others ran close by it. The crippled monster sprang savagely at the other and in a moment they were writhing and struggling in the brush, tearing at one another with tiger-like ferocity. The others passed by them for a moment while I finished emptying the rifle, without visible results.

BY THAT time the crackle of the swiftly spreading fire had grown to a dull roar. It swept fast across the brush, red flames flaring high and dense smoke rolling up into the night. The purple beasts did not appear to see it. They made no effort to avoid the flames. Were they invulnerable to fire? Or was fire merely unknown to them as to the people of Astran?

The three rushed straight on toward us, disregarding the rushing wall of flame not a dozen yards to the right of them. I kept firing madly. The leg of one went limp, but he leapt on with scarcely diminished speed, laughing terribly, white hair flying about his awful face while his purple limbs moved frenziedly. The flames rushed over the fallen two and hid them. In another instant the curtain of fire rolled over the others and even the ship was hidden from our view.

Suddenly I realized that we were in quite as much danger from the fire as from the monsters. Already we were shrinking from the hot wind that blew before the flames, half choked by the acrid fumes. For the second time we made a mad retreat to the top of the boulder and lay flat.

I heard a terrible laugh from the flames and one of the things dashed out. His hair was gone, his purple flesh burnt black. I shot at it showed itself and it fell. In another instant the flames had raced over it again. None of the others appeared.

We lay on the rock for several minutes, gasping in the cooler air that lingered near its surface. For a time the heat was stifling but the scanty vegetation burned off quickly and soon a cool breeze came up from the south and lifted the smoke.

We saw that the cylinder still lay where it had been although the heavy body was closed. The green light still shone in the forward end. About it the earth lay black and smoking and a low line of flame lay below the pall of smoke in a great ring all about us. Between us and the ship I saw in the darkness the black shadows that were the five dead man-beasts.

I was just beginning to wonder if all the crew of the ship were dead so that we might enter and examine it when the great oval door in the side swung open again and something sprang out of it into the night. I heard a strange hissing and a clatter of metal.

In the semi-darkness I could see nothing plainly but there was a floating shape of greenish mist with a vague form beneath. I strained my eyes to try to distinguish its shape while it stood motionless.

Abruptly a narrow intensely-bright beam of orange light shot out of it and impinged upon the rock. There was a dull thud from the rock and the ray was dead in a moment. But the granite where it had struck was cut away—obliterated! The beam had shone straight through the boulder, carrying away or resolving into primary electrons the matter on which it had struck! The smooth edges of the cut were glowing with a soft violet radiance.

My rifle was at hand and on recovering from my surprise I fired. I aimed just below the greenish patch. Something must have been exploded by the bullet, for there was a vivid flash of white fire and a loud sharp report. The spot of green was visible no longer and we saw no motion about the cylinder.

At the time I had no idea what it was that I had shot. I supposed that it had been another of the purple beasts, armed with a strange ray-weapon. I imagined that the bullet had struck the weapon and caused the explosion.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE IN THE MIST

FOR perhaps an hour we sat there on the rock. As soon as the smoke cleared we could see the crimson needles flying high upon their vague red tracks. We watched them with a sort of hypnotic fascination, dreading the moment when one of them would land to investigate the fate of the ship that lay silent and presumably empty before us.

The ground was still too hot for us to walk upon and we felt the uselessness of attempting to escape on foot, even if it had already cooled. With a feeling of resigned and hopeless horror we saw one of the crimson pencils circle lower about the place, then disappear in the direction of its lair beyond the Silver Lake.

Even as the whistling roar of its passage was rolling down upon us Melvar spoke. How I admire the courage and indomitable resourcefulness of the girl. While I was hopelessly lost in despair, feeling all the desolation of this region and the infinite remoteness of the world of men, her pure rich voice and the warm living touch of her hand brought new courage to me.

"The Krimlu are coming," she cried. "There is no use to try to fight them or to try to outrun them. But that ship must be empty. The walls are metal and strong. Perhaps they could not open it."

While several things about the proposition were not very attractive

it seemed our best resource. Besides, I had a keen desire to see the interior. We gathered up our equipment, climbed off the boulder, buried over to the cylinder.

I was possessed by a haunting fear that we would find something hideous awaiting us but the bright pencil of light from my pocket lamp revealed no living being in the long interior. Nor could I find even a trace of the green patch that had blown up in front of the door. We scrambled through the opening without difficulty and I turned a handle that swung the heavy door shut and evidently locked it.

Then I set about examining the mechanism for I had an intense curiosity about the propulsive force that enabled the vessel to attain a speed that must have reached thousands of miles per hour. In one end were rows of long cylinders of a transparent substance, evidently filled with the metallic fluid from the Silver Lake.

Pipes ran from them to a complex mechanism in the rear end of the ship, from which heavy conduits ran all over the inside of the metal hull. While my understanding of it was far from complete I was able to verify a previous idea—that the strange vessels were driven by use of the rocket principle.

It seems that the silver fluid was decomposed in the machine and that the purple gas it formed at a very high temperature was forced out through the various tubes at a terrific velocity, propelling the ship by its reaction. The whistling roar of the things in motion was, of course, the sound of the escaping gas. The red-purple tracks were merely the expelled gas hanging in the air.

The green globe in the forward end may have been the objective lens for a marvelous periscope. At any rate the walls of the forward part of the shell seemed transparent. And the periscope must have utilized infra-red rays, for the

scene about us seemed much brighter than it was in reality. We could see very plainly the burned plain and the granite rock, and once, through a rift in the clouds of smoke that were rising about, I caught a glimpse of the gleaming city of Astran, high above us in the west.

I noticed a slender lever with a corrugated disc at the top, rising out of the floor in the bow of the ship. It occurred to me that it was the control lever. I took hold of it and gingerly pushed it back. Great jets of purple gas rushed past the transparent walls about us and the ship slid backward on the ground. The sensation of motion was most alarming.

The illusion of the transparency of the bow of the ship was so perfect that it seemed almost as if we were hanging in space a few feet in the front of the mouth of an open tube. It was impossible for me to realize that I was surrounded by solid walls of metal until I touched them.

I think the wonderful telescope worked on much the same principle as television—that is, the rays of light were picked up, converted into electrical impulses, amplified and then projected on the metal wall, which served as a screen.

I RETURNED to my experiments with the lever. The control was relatively simple. The vessel was propelled forward when the lever was pushed forward, reversed when the lever was pulled back. Slipping the little disc up or down raised or lowered the prow and twisting it accomplished the steering in the horizontal plane.

By the time my cautious experiments revealed all this Melvar had pointed out three slender crimson craft, wheeling low about us and evidently preparing to land. I pulled the knob up and pushed it forward all the way. A pale red beam shot ahead. The black landscape dropped

away from us and we hurtled through the air of the night.

I was amazed at the lack of any great sensation of motion, that the jets of gas, for all their appalling roar without, were barely audible within the cylinder. Still the foremost of the ship was transparent from within, so that we had the oddest sensation of floating free in space.

I saw that the three ships had fallen in a line behind us, and were following at the same terrific pace. When we had reached an altitude of perhaps a mile I twisted the knob to bring the helm about. We shot over the Silver Lake, which lay like a white desert of moonlit sand beneath us, standing out sharply against the dark plain around it.

In a moment we had gone over it and over the low hills beyond into the bank of purple mist. I had hoped to have time to land and have the vessel on the ground below but I looked back and saw that our pursuers were gaining swiftly. Slender twisting rays of bright orange and green were darting toward us from the hurtling arrow-like ships of red.

In the darkness and the mist we could see nothing of the ground below. The only visible things were a few mist-veiled stars above and the bright scarlet torpedoes that shot after us. Quickly I circled and raised the helm. I was almost intoxicated with excitement and the indescribable sensations of our swift and lofty flight.

I felt released from all the weakness of the body—I had conquered the force that holds all men to earth. I felt a new wonderful sensation of freedom and power. I had but to move the little piece of metal in my hand to go where I pleased with almost the speed of light. But still the line of ships behind us came out at an incredible pace, stabbing at us with the green and orange rays.

Then, high above the others, I brought the ship around in a hair-

pin turn and plunged directly at them. They tried to turn aside while their rays shot thickly toward us but our speed was too great. The foremost suddenly turned broadside toward us, attempting to get out of our path. I held our bow directly at it, raised it a trifle at the last instant. The keel of our vessel struck the other amidships. The terrific crash of the collision hurled us to the floor.

When I regained my feet we were falling in a crazy twisting path, our ship altogether out of control. No sooner was I on my feet than the floor tilted up again and I fell back to my hands and knees. I saw that the one we had struck was broken in two and plunging toward the earth far behind us while the other two were circling far overhead.

The mist about us grew thicker until the other ships and the fragments of the wrecked one were strangely colored purple—thicker still, until they vanished. We floated in a world of purple fog.

I seized the control lever as soon as our wild gyrations enabled me to reach it but my unskilled efforts only resulted in making us roll and twist more wildly. So long as we had been on an even keel the piloting had been easy enough, although I imagine my success in ramming the other ship had been largely due to luck. But the blow against us had been broadside, setting the ship to spinning like a top. It seemed that we fell an interminable time. Whenever the stern pointed downward for a moment I pushed the lever forward to check our fall as much as possible.

Through the mist I suddenly caught a glimpse of the dark ground below. In another instant the vessel had struck heavily, throwing us against the floor again.

Day was beginning to break at last and we could see that we had fallen on a bare gravelled hilltop. The clear space was only an acre or

so in extent. We were shut in on all sides by a dense dark forest of gigantic trees that rose threateningly, seeming to grasp us, to close in on us. The purple mist hung in a sombre curtain overhead.

NARO and I strapped on our packs, picked up our weapons and opened the door. The three of us stepped out to face the perils of another world. What they might be we did not know. I had no idea what part of the country was inhabited by the Krimlu. But Austen had not let himself be conquered by the mere strangeness of the place. I still hoped to be able to find him although a search in such a jungle as that about us seemed hopeless.

The walls of the rocket-ship were still glowing dull red with the heat of its passage through the air and we hurried away over the gravel for fifty yards to get beyond the fierce heat it radiated. The patch of sky above was a dull dusky luminescent purple.

All about us towered the forest. As the light grew better we could see that the trees were red. They bore the same feathery fronds, the same starlike flowers of brilliant white, the same golden-brown fruits as the plants of the plain about Astran. But they were immensely greater—they towered up hundreds of feet.

It was like a forest of the tree-ferns of the Carboniferous period, save for the deep bloody scarlet of the leaves.

The ground all about the knoll was low and marshy and the air was heavy with the odors of rotting vegetation. There was no wind and the air, under the great atmospheric pressure, was heavy, moist and hot. It was oppressive. It hung like a weight upon our chests. And the crimson jungle seemed to possess a terrible life and spirit of its own. It did not belong to our world.

The undergrowth was very thick.

The higher branches were dimmed by the purple mist. They seemed almost to reach the heavy dull purple sky. It appeared useless to try to penetrate it. It was an evil being, waiting to seize us.

I got out my compass and we decided to try to make our way toward the north in the direction of the pass by which we supposed Austen to have rounded the Silver Lake. As I had last noted our position above the mist, with reference to the lake and the crater walls, we had been roughly fifteen miles south of the pass. I hoped, by taking a course in that direction, to come across some trace of Austen.

As we approached the north side of the clearing I made a startling discovery. In the side of the hill was a deposit of iron pyrites. Not that there was anything remarkable about that. But the thing that struck me was that the vein had been recently worked!

I sprang down in the pit and found on the rock traces of copper that had evidently come from soft copper tools. I knew that Austen would have needed minerals, that, indeed, if he had set up a wireless outfit in here, he must have been compelled to do an immense amount of work in collecting and refining the needed materials.

I had little doubt that he had been there but it had been evidently weeks or months earlier. Any trail that he might have made through the forest would have already grown up.

I thought the situation over for awhile but there still seemed nothing better to do than to follow our original plan of exploring the jungle to the north. We plunged into the crimson gloom. Without the compass we would have been quickly lost. Even with it it was hard enough to keep in the same direction, walking over the marshy ground and breaking a path through the heavy undergrowth. We were soon covered with mud and dyed red

with the stain of the vegetation.

For many hours we struggled through a wilderness of endless sameness—a dank morass, a crimson jungle, with the dusky purple sky hanging heavily in the treetops.

At first the forest had been quiet with a silence that was dead and depressing, for there were no living things about us. No birds, no insects—not even a bright moth or butterfly. It was a wilderness of death. But presently we heard, far ahead of us, a dull constant roar, that grew louder as we went on.

At last it grew so loud that we had to shout when we wished one another to hear our words. I was glad of the roar for it drowned the sound of our progress through the jungle. But the forest was so dense that there seemed little danger of our capture unless we stumbled on the habitation of the Krimlu.

Abruptly the jungle ended and we stepped out on a bare ledge of stone. Before us was one of the most magnificent spectacles that I have beheld. To the west a great black cliff rose perhaps a thousand feet—until it was almost lost against the lowering smoky purple of the sky. Over it plunged a vast sheet of the glowing white liquid of the Silver Lake, falling in a gigantic unbroken arch to the immense pool beneath us, where it broke with a deafening roar into a gleaming bank of soft silver haze.

Surrounding the black rock rims of the pool the gloomy crimson of the forest closed in. The pool itself was a thousand feet across. The whole scene was colossal. It was awe-inspiring and impressive.

There was no visible outlet for the silver liquid. So I knew that it must find its way off underground. I sensed that we must be far below the level of the Silver Lake and the plain beyond. That fact may have accounted for the more luxuriant growth of the red vegetation.

Suddenly Naro reported the dis-

covery of the comparatively fresh print of a hob-nailed boot in a little patch of mould on the rock. That set us to looking again for traces of Austen and presently we found a well-defined trail that led east.

We followed it eagerly. When we had gone perhaps a mile we came to an outcropping seam of coal. There I found the plain marks of a copper pick. Evidently a good deal of coal had been dug up and carried off down the trail.

CHAPTER IX

AUSTEN'S RETREAT

PERHAPS two hundred yards further we came upon the camp. It was atop a little hill below a giant tree. By the trunk was a mud-daubed hut with an open shed in front of it. By the shed was a rude clap furnace with piles of coal, some strange ore and large lumps of native copper lying by it.

Beneath the shed was what appeared to be a small steam turbine with a kettle-like boiler of hammered copper. Connected with it was a dynamo of crude but ingenious construction. Also there were a rude forge and hammers, anvils, saws and drills, all of copper or bronze and a device that I supposed had been used for drawing wire.

Simple as it seemed that camp of Austen's was perhaps the most remarkable thing I came across in the crater. Austen was a wonderful man. Having not only an exhaustive knowledge of a half dozen fields of science—and he had not mere theories but a practical working knowledge—he had also courage and determination, patience, manual skill, resourcefulness and invention.

While the average man would hardly have been able to keep alive in the jungle Austen was able to do

such things as smelt and refine ore and set up complicated and workable electrical machinery. Of course he was fortunate in finding himself in a place where practically no effort was needed to satisfy his physical needs and where he could find various natural resources in available and easily accessible form. But I shall never cease to wonder at his accomplishments in less than a year.

I was struck by a sudden fear that we had come too late, that something had happened to him. "Austen!" I shouted, "Austen, are you here?"

For answer an old man, whom I recognized joyfully as the scientist, appeared in the rude doorway of the hut. His clothing was tattered beyond description and he looked very worn and thin. There were lines of age about his wrinkled face.

But his hair was neatly brushed and he had just been shaving for his safety razor was in his hand. A smile of astonishment and incredulous joy sprang over his face. For a moment he was speechless. Then the old familiar voice called out uncertainly, almost sobbing with joy.

"Winfield! Melvar! Naro! Can it really be you? At last!"

Then, as if he were a little ashamed of the feeling he had shown, he pulled out his pipe and began to try to fill it, his fingers trembling with emotion. But Melvar sprang to him and threw her arms about him in a way that gave me a momentary pang of jealousy. He stuck the pipe back in his pocket, grinning awkwardly in a way that tightened the strings of my heart.

"I forgot," he said. "My tobacco was all gone a week ago."

I shook his hand and it clung to mine for a moment as if he were seeking support. Then Naro placed his palm upon Austen's shoulder in the customary greeting of Astran.

"I'd almost given up," the old man said. "The world is so far away that it seems almost unreal. After

I had sent the wireless call a few times the devilish rustling in the sky got too close for comfort and I decided that the hissing red lights, whatever they are, were about to locate me by the signals. So I quit that. But how did you come over?"

I told him briefly about our adventure with the red ship.

"Yes, I knew that the things were ships of some kind," he said when I had finished. "I have been working on the quicksilver stuff and making a few exploring trips. I have discovered several things. I had to work—work endlessly—to keep going. Sometimes I got to feeling pretty low.

"Then I would shave and try to clean up like a civilized man. And I kept repeating all the poetry I knew—that helped a lot. But Lord—you haven't any idea how glad I am to see you! By the way, did you bring the spectroscope and tubes?"

By way of reply I took off the pack that contained them. He began to open it with as much enthusiasm as a small boy investigating a Christmas present. Suddenly he looked at us. "But you don't look as if you've had any holiday yourselves. What happened to you?"

"Two or three things," I told him. "It hasn't been a holiday at all. Do you happen to have any coffee left? I left mine in the tent outside the cliffs."

"And how about a little hot Mulligan stew to go with it?" He grinned, beckoning the way inside.

SO WE went into the cabin. Most of the room seemed to be devoted to his crude laboratory equipment. On one of his benches were several roughly modeled pottery jars, filled with the liquid from the Silver Sea.

In a few minutes he had the coffeepot boiling over a charcoal brazier. I believe its aroma was about the most pleasant that ever reached my nostrils.

When the coffee was done Austen

served a meal consisting of a great pot of steaming soup made of the yellow fruits, cooked with the tender roots of the red plants. That stands out in my memory as one of the truly magnificent repasts that have ever been laid before me.

Finished, Melvar retired to Austen's bunk and Naro and I lay down on a blanket on the laboratory floor. I went to sleep at once and, if I may credit the word of our host, slept for thirty-seven and a half hours. Although I am inclined to believe that is an exaggeration.

At any rate, when I got up I felt a new man. Austen had set up the apparatus we brought. He had a test tube full of the silver liquid in a beam of X-rays. The spectroscope was in position to examine the dense purple gas that was rising from the stuff.

"How's it coming?" I asked him.

He shook his head sadly. "I don't know," he said. "I have a theory but it doesn't seem to work out right. The key is in sight but it always eludes me. There is energy stored in the silver liquid. It may be that that amazing thing in the sky stores the energy of sunlight in the stuff.

"You know that the energy in sunlight amounts to something over one horsepower for each square yard on which it falls. Or perhaps the atomic energy of the gases in the air is released. It seems impossible to find the key although I have been able to analyze the stuff pretty accurately. If I had it I could make the silver stuff go off like ten times its weight of T.N.T."

"Do you think," I asked him eagerly, "that you could set off some of it and wipe out the Krimlu?"

"Winfield," the old scientist soberly replied, "even if you could, would you wipe out a whole civilization—a science as high as that which made the Silver Lake—a culture equal to, if not above, that of our own world?"

"If you had seen those purple things—men and women, old and hideous and fearfully strong and malignant—you couldn't move too quickly to blot them off the earth," I cried.

"I have seen," he said seriously. "I have seen the purple monsters and they are terrible enough. But they are not the masters. They are but the servants or perhaps I should say the machines of a higher power.

"There is another form of intelligence here, Winfield. A form of life unrelated to humanity, without any sympathy for mankind or any share of human feelings. Perhaps it is a danger to the human race. These beings would not hesitate, I suppose, to use all humanity as they have used the people of Astran.

"But that does not solve the problem. Would it be right to wipe them out? Perhaps it would be better for mankind to go under. Perhaps they are superior to us. The purposes of the creation of intelligent life might be better met by these things than by man. I have given it a great deal of thought and I can't decide."

He fell silent and presently I said, "You say there is another form of life here. What is it like?"

"You will know soon enough. I wish I had never seen. It is not a good thing to talk about. There is no use for me to tell you."

HE WOULD tell me no more. Presently I left him and went down to bathe in the stream that flowed back of the camp. The water was sluggish and tepid, certainly not invigorating, but it was cleansing. When I got back Melvar and Naro were up. The girl seemed very glad to see Austen again. She was talking with him, very vivacious and very beautiful. When I saw her I loved her more than ever.

As soon as we had eaten Austen began to dismount the spectrometer and other equipment and pack them. "I can go no farther with the experi-

ments here," he said. "I am going to take the outfit to a place where we can see one of the engines of the Krimlu, where the silver liquid is broken up. There I may be able to get the clue I need."

In an hour we were ready to depart. Austen led the way, silent and preoccupied with the details of his work. We went down a narrow trail through the stagnating marshes in the eldritch gloom of the weird red jungle under the dull purple mist. For many hours we were on the way until the purple dusk began to thicken and a distant sighing whistle told us that night had fallen and the evil masters were abroad again.

Suddenly Austen called out in a guarded tone for us to halt. We crept forward cautiously until we could see over the brink of a vast circular chasm. Sheer black walls, ringed by the red jungle, fell for a thousand feet. The round floor was a half mile across.

Upon it was the most gigantic and amazing mechanical device I have ever seen. It was incredibly huge and throbbing with strange energy. It made little sound but the air all about us seemed vibrant with power.

In the center of the pit was a titanic shining green cylinder, perhaps a hundred feet in diameter and five hundred in length. A river of gleaming silver fluid ran from an opening in the rock through a great open aqueduct and poured into the cylinder in the middle of the upper-side.

At each end of the colossal cylinder rose a metal tower. At the top of each tower was a fifty-foot globe of blue crystal, slowly turning. Between and above the spheres arched a high-flung span of white fire—a great pulsing sheet of milky opalescent light—that roared and crackled like a powerful electric discharge and lit the chasm with an unearthly radiance.

Toward the farther side of the

floor was a second enormous machine, apparently unconnected with the first, resembling a vast telescope. The white metal tube was a full two hundred feet in length, mounted on massive metal supports. It did not seem to be in action. The barrel of it was pointing at the sky.

Then I saw a row of openings low down in the side of the vast green cylinder with shafts of bright green light pouring from them. And I saw tiny human figures working feverishly about them. They had escaped my observation at first, so far away was the floor of the pit. Now I saw that they were taking great blocks of a luminous green substance from the doors in the cylinder and carrying them to the tube that was pointing at the sky.

I saw now that the bodies of the toilers were purple. There was something in their motion that reminded me of ants. I was amazed at their strength and agility, at their ceaseless machine-like activity.

I remembered the time I had splashed the white fluid on my arm, turning it purple, and the strange excitement of my nerves. At once I linked up the raids on Astran, the bracelet that Naro had found on the dead purple beast and what Austen had told me of superior beings who enslaved the purple things. I knew that I looked upon the captured men and women of Astran, converted to machines in this strange place!

Perhaps they were already dead. Certainly they moved not by their own volition but by a stronger mechanical power. They must have been under the absolute hypnotic control of the higher intelligences, who treated their unfortunate captives, perhaps with the argent liquid, to convert them into unearthly machines of superhuman strength.

We turned away into the night that had fallen on the red jungle while we watched. I was sick with horror. Austen's face was white and his hands were trembling.

Now I knew, in spite of what he had said, that were the opportunity given him he would not hesitate to wipe out the masters of the purple slaves. He said nothing but his hands worked spasmodically, he muttered under his breath and his dark eyes snapped with angry determination.

In a little while we set about preparing the apparatus for the work of the night. The spectroscope was set up with telescopic condensers to collect and analyze the radiation of the arch of crackling milky flame. We took care to screen ourselves in the jungle fringe and to expose no more of the equipment to the sight of the beings below than necessary.

Austen had his drawing board set up in a convenient place behind our shelter and he alternately peered through the telescope at the spectrum and turned to make intricate calculations by the light of a shaded flashlight. We worked till dawn.

All night long the white flame played between the spinning blue crystal spheres above the vast green cylinder, filling the air with its ghostly crackle and whisper. All night long the tireless purple human machines toiled in the pit, carrying the great green blocks and evidently stacking them in the vast cannon-like tube at the side.

Whenever Austen did not need me with the analysis I spent my time searching that amazing scene. But not once did I catch a glimpse of anything that might have been the directing intelligence of all that marvelous activity.

Melvar was very tired and I had contrived a hammock for her from a great sheet of fibrous bark torn from the trunk of one of the red trees. She spent the night asleep in that while Austen and I carried on the work. Naro, not having scientific inclinations, contented himself with a couch composed of a few feathery branches torn from the undergrowth.

CHAPTER X

WHAT THE ANALYSIS SHOWED

JUST before daylight Austen completed his calculations and stated the result. He was very tired, and his eyes were red. He had worked for a day and two nights since we had found him.

"You know," he said, "that there are several rare gases in the air in addition to oxygen and nitrogen. The inert gas argon comprises nearly one percent of the atmosphere and there are, in addition, smaller quantities of helium, neon, xenon and krypton, not to mention carbon dioxide and water vapor. Those gases are monatomic and do not ordinarily enter into any compounds.

"You know that lightning in the air causes a union of nitrogen and oxygen, to form nitrous and nitric acids, which may later release their energy in the explosion of gunpowder or nitroglycerine. In much the same way the force that forms the silver fluid utilizes the photochemical effect of sunlight to build up a complex molecule containing oxygen, nitrogen and the inert gases of helium group.

"It is very unstable and may be disrupted with the release of a great amount of energy. I was able to detect the characteristic lines of most of the gases in the luminous spectrum of the purple gas—but not until I had analyzed the light of the opalescent flame and made my deductions from that was I able to derive the equations and arrive at the precise structural formula and at the exact wavelength necessary to break down the molecule."

He proceeded to launch into a detailed technical discussion of the process of analysis he had used and of the methods of inductive reasoning by which he had arrived at his

conclusion. It was rather deep for me and I am afraid some of the salient points have already slipped my mind.

Something more important was on my mind. "Have you found out enough?" I asked. "Can you blow up the stuff? Can you wipe out the Krimlu?"

"I am not sure," he said, "but I think, if I could get at that machine with a little of my equipment, I could manipulate it to make it go off like a thousand tons of dynamite. The silver stuff runs into the cylinder and is converted into pure vibrant energy. If I could just speed up the process a bit!"

"The Krimlu seem to live underground like ants. A month ago I found an opening into their world near the cliff south of the falls. There are the shafts where their ships come out, ventilator tubes and funnels for the purple smoke from their engines. I will go down one of the shafts and see what can be done."

"You mean we will go," I told him. "You don't think—"

"There is no need for you to risk your life," he said in a voice purposely brusque to hide his emotion. "I can do as much by myself. Then there is Melvar. We must get her out of here if we can. I think a great deal of her. If we both should go—and not come back . . ."

"No, I want you to stay on top. I know I can trust you to treat her fairly. If I can blast down the earth on their underground world we might be able to make it back around the Silver Sea and eventually to the outside."

"You can trust me, sir, to care for her to the best of my ability," I told him, trying without notable success to keep my voice even and casual.

"Really?" He cried, looking at me intensely. "Do you love her?"

I admitted that I did.

"I had hoped so," Austen said.

"She and you are the ones dearest to me in the world. If you were out and safe I could—go—in peace."

The rude hammock in which Melvar had been lying sprang into violent motion and erupted her slender beautiful figure. She came running toward me. "I am sorry," she gasped. "No, I mean I am glad. I was awake, Winfield. I heard you—" Her later statements were not particularly coherent, since she was kissing me and I was holding her in my arms and returning the embrace. I gathered on the whole that my feelings for her were well reciprocated. Some minutes later, when I came back to earth, I observed that Austen was taking the equipment down and that Naro was standing and looking at us with an expression of extreme and comical disgust on his face.

BY THAT time it was light and soon, by the brightening of the purple haze above, we knew the sun was rising. I saw that Austen was looking into the pit. Melvar and I walked to the edge. The great metal tube, which the purple beings had been all night in loading with the green bars, was being swung slowly about upon its mounting until presently it was pointing at the sky.

For a moment nothing happened. Then a low humming drone reached our ears, coming apparently from the complex machinery at the base of the tube. Steadily the sound rose in pitch, until it was an intolerably high and painful scream. Suddenly the high rhythm of it had become unsupportable and we ceased to hear it. But I knew that it had merely passed up the scale beyond the range of our ears.

Abruptly the colossal tube seemed to flash into green incandescence and a broad beam of yellow light, blindingly brilliant and pulsing with strange energy, poured up into the dusky purple sky. Then I knew that it was this machine which made the amazing thing above the Silver Sea

from which the white liquid fell.

As we watched bright patches of red and green shot up the beam. Slowly the bright yellow faded from the ray but still the green luminosity clung about the tube and still I felt that the flood of radiant purposeful energy was flowing up into the sky.

It was not long before I heard, far above us in the distant west beyond the red-clad hill, the splash of the first great drop of silver into the argent lake. Below us the white torrent was still pouring into the vast green cylinder, the white fire was still arching between the crystal globes and the purple slaves were still rushing about the pit with feverish machine-like energy.

We turned away from the place and walked back into the terrible and weird semi-darkness of the scarlet jungle, still beneath the shadow of the evil intelligence that ruled the crater.

We reached the camp long before night and Austen and I went to sleep. The old scientist was up again at daylight. I was amazed at his energy and vitality. He got ready the equipment he intended to take and we were soon ready to set out for the entrance of the underworld.

Austen insisted that we leave Melvar and Naro behind. There was no use, he said, in exposing them to the hardships and dangers of the journey and it seemed that no harm would be likely to come to them at the cabin.

I did not like to leave Melvar but she was very courageous about it, smiling through her tears. It always takes more courage for those who stay behind and wait than for those who have the lure of mystery and adventure to beckon them on.

Melvar walked with me to the edge of the clearing and there we left her, taking a dim trail that led through the dense jungle to the south. Austen was saying nothing. He was lost in meditation. But I knew that when the time came he

would be ready for action.

But how could I guess the noble thoughts that were passing in his mind? How could I realize that he was marching willingly to his doom? For my part I was thinking of the wonderful girl I had left at the cabin. I thought too of the horror of the lights that haunted Astran and of the horror that would come if the lights ever went beyond the rim—into the outer world.

After several hours Austen stopped. "It is not a half-mile to the shafts," he said. "We shall have to make a rope. I have made cords from the tough bark of the red trees. They do very well. I want to reach the bottom of the pit before night.

"But I have reason to think that the things are active in their underworld at all hours of the day, emerging at night only because the magnetic vibration of sunlight interferes with the operation of the delicate machinery of their bodies."

We began to weave a rope of strins of leather-like bark torn from the mighty red trees. We kept at it until we had many hundred feet of the tough strands. As we worked Austen began to talk a little, in a voice that was very low and a little husky, of his boyhood on a Western farm and of the bright spots of his life.

He told a few stories of his school and college days, of the girl he had loved and lost. But when the rope was finished and coiled, he fell silent again, and grimly examined his automatic. He adjusted his pack, got out his pipe and filled it with my tobacco, and grinned. Then he said soberly, "We are here. We are ready to play our hand, to win or to lose. And if we lose . . ."

He thrust out his hand. I shook it and we walked on silently. We had not gone more than a hundred yards when the scarlet forest thinned and we walked out on a level stretch of bare white sand.

Along the western side rose a dark precipitous cliff like that over which

the silver fall plunged with a line of red brush along the top. At its foot was a great sloping bank of talus, scattered with gigantic boulders. The cliff and the lofty crimson forest that rimmed the open space on the other three sides seemed to reach into the dusky purple of obscurity of the low-hanging sky.

Spaced irregularly about the center of the flat were perhaps a dozen low circular metal structures—evidently the mouths of great white metal tubes projecting from the earth. From five of them dense clouds of purple vapor were pouring.

WE LEFT the shelter of the jungle and quickly approached the nearest of the wells. The metal curbing was about four feet high around a circular pit some 20 feet in diameter. We leaned over and looked into it. The tube was lit faintly for a few feet down the walls but we saw no light toward the bottom.

A faint humming sound came up out of the darkness and I felt a strong current of air flowing down the tube. It was altogether stranger and more terrible than I had anticipated. I doubt that I could have found the courage to descend. "Is the rope long enough?" I whispered.

"Yes," he replied. "On the day I discovered this place I dropped a pebble in the well and timed its fall with my watch. The depth is just over five hundred feet."

I put the end of the cord over the metal rim and paid it out until only enough was left to hitch around my body. With a smile of forced cheerfulness Austen looked to his pack, knocked out the pipe and put it in his pocket.

"Winfield, my boy, I hope to see you soon again," he said. "It may take only an hour or two to lay my mine and return to the shaft."

"You wait and hold the rope and if I need to send you any message I will jerk it three times and you can pull it up. The note will tell when to put it down again for me to climb out. Good-by, my boy. You—"

He started to say something more

but his voice broke and he turned abruptly to the well. I braced myself against the curbing as he climbed over and started down. I looked over and watched him. In a few moments his head and shoulders had shrunk to a little blot against the darkness of the well. Soon he was out of my sight although for a long time I felt the tugging of the rope.

Suddenly the tension relaxed. He had reached the bottom or—fearful thought—he had lost his grip on the rope and was hurtling downward through the darkness. I listened in an agony of suspense. It was several minutes before I was reassured to feel three twitches of the cord. I pulled it up. On the end was tied a piece of paper, with these words penciled upon it—

Dear Winfield—I hate to leave us thus without warning you as I intend to do. But I could not tell you. Go back, get Melvar and travel as far as you can from this accursed place. May you and she survive and lead a happy life together in here if you cannot reach the world beyond.

I will give you twenty hours. In that time you can go far north of the silver falls. I am sure that with the equipment I now have I can explode one of the engines and send all this part of the valley skyward—if I live to carry out my plan. Good-by,

Austen.

Then I saw that he had been planning all along to give up his life. The note had been written some time before he left. I cursed the stupidity that had kept me from perceiving his intention. Dear old Austen! The truest friend I ever had! His smiling face, his kind blue eyes, his low familiar voice, are gone forever!

CHAPTER XI

THE FOREST AFLAME

I HAVE a very confused recollection of what happened immediately afterward. My own actions

seem a vague disordered dream. My bitter grief at Austen's self-sacrifice was the only thing real to me. I believe I began carrying rocks from the boulder-strewn slope at the foot of the cliff with the idea of securing the rope to them so that I could go down in search for him.

The first thing I remember clearly is that I was staggering back to the shaft with a heavy rock in my arms when I caught a whiff of acrid smoke and awoke to the realization that the purple sky was darkened with drifting clouds, the air already heavy with the suffocating pungent odor of burning red vegetation.

I knew that, had the red-hot rocket-ship in which we had crossed the Silver Sea chanced to fall in the jungle instead of on the barren hill-top, a conflagration would have spread from it at once. Abruptly I remembered that the glowing fragments of the one we had wrecked had fallen in the northern forest. Austen's cabin lay in that direction! I knew that the red vegetation was peculiarly inflammable, that the fire, fed on the oxygen of the heavy atmosphere, would advance with terrible speed.

For a moment, in a panic of indecision, I listened. From the north I heard the crackling roar of a mighty conflagration. Then my mind was made up. Any attempt to find Austen and induce him to give up his plan of self-sacrifice would be terribly uncertain.

Melvar was in immediate danger and I knew that Austen valued her life above his own. But even then I knew in my heart that it was too late, though I would not let myself believe it. Fire is a pitiless and remorseless enemy.

At a dead run I started up the trail by which we had entered the clearing. Even the smoke became thicker and more acrid while the crackling roar of the fire rang ever louder in my ears. I ran on through the ghastly gloom of the scarlet jungle in mad desperation even after hope was gone, until the hot suffocating breath of the flames was

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choking me.

The vast wall of flame swept forward like a voracious demoniac thing of crimson, implacable, irresistible, overwhelming. It plunged forward like a rushing tidal wave of red. Already the fire had passed the site of the cabin!

I was suddenly hopeless and despairing and very tired. The flames rushed forward faster by far than a human being could force a way through the jungle. With the knowledge that I had just lost the only two things that in all the world of men ever mattered to me it hardly seemed worth while to try to save my own life.

For a moment I stood there, about to cast myself into the flames. But it is not the nature of an animal to die willingly no matter how slight the promise of life may be.

WHEN I could endure the heat no longer, when the pain of my blistered skin and the outcries of my tortured lungs had grown unsupportable, I turned and ran toward the clearing again.

My nostrils and lungs were seared and smarting. The hot wind dried my skin and left it scorched and cracked. I was blinded by the smoke. I longed to throw myself down and seek the temporary ecstasy of a breath of clear air from near the ground, of a cooling plunge into a muddy pool. The red jungle reeled about me but I fought my way on like a man in a dream.

At last I staggered into the open space. The last of the giant trees exploded into flames not a score of yards behind me. Sparks rained upon me. My clothing caught fire. I ran on, fighting the flames with my hands. The jungle back of me roared deafeningly, an angry surging sea of lurid red flames.

Heat radiation poured across the clearing in a pitiless beam. I struggled on across the white sand, away from flames that tossed themselves up like volcano-ridden ranges of scarlet alps, until I reached the shelter of a great boulder on the slope below the cliff.

I flung myself down behind the rock, gulping down the cool air and rubbing out the fire in my clothing with my blackened hands. For many hours I lay there, tortured by thirst and pain. At last I fell into a light sleep of troubled dreams in which huge winged green ants flew after me through burning crimson forests and in which I saw the dear form of Melvar devoured again and again by the flames.

I was awakened after a time, I know not how long, by a cool wind that had sprung up from the north. For a moment my mind was lost in blank wonder, then came the desolate awareness that Melvar and Austen were lost. In hopeless misery I got weakly to my feet and walked unsteadily around the boulder until I could look across the clearing.

As I leaned against the rock, gazing eastward, it was a strangely altered and desolate scene that lay before my eyes. The red forest was gone. Below me was a region of low rolling hills, black and grim beneath the lowering, smoky purple sky.

The white sand about me stood out in sharp contrast to the charred and gloomy waste beyond, from which a few slender wisps of dark smoke were still rising. All life was gone. It was a dead world. But still the dense purple clouds poured out of the shafts of the underworld, adding their weight to the dismal sky.

A great homesickness for the world and my fellow men came over me. Then I heard a strange humming behind me and a slight metallic clatter. I turned around in apathetic curiosity.

I came face to face with a monster so utterly strange and terrible that the very shock of it almost unseated my wandering reason.

At first I looked on the thing with a curious lack of interest, as the soul of one newly dead might look with numbed faculties on his new habitation. But as I looked upon it an icy current of fear stole over me like the creeping cold of the north. I had met so many horrors that I had begun to think myself immune. But

I had met no such thing as that.

I knew that it was intelligent, a sentient being. But it was not human, not a thing of flesh and blood at all. It was a machine! Or rather it was in a machine, for I felt more of it than I saw—a will, a cold and alien intellect, a being, malefic, inhuman, inscrutable.

It was a thing that belonged not in the present earth but in the tomb of the unthinkable past or beyond the wastes of interstellar space amid the inconceivable horrors of unknown spheres.

There was a bright gleaming globe, three feet in diameter, lit with vivid flowing fires of violet and green. A strange swirling mist of brilliant points of many colored lights danced madly about it—a coruscating fog of iridescent fire—moving, flickering, in an incredible rhythm.

THAT unearthly thing rested upon a frame of metal. It was the head of a metallic monster. It was set on an oblong box of white metal to which were attached six long-jointed metal limbs. The being stood nine feet high at least.

It was standing on three of the limbs and holding my rifle, which I had left where I had been lying, turning it and feeling of it with a cluster of slender fingerlike tentacles on the end of the metal arm. It was working the mechanism of the gun and apparently looking at it though it had no eyes that I could see.

Suddenly the gun went off, throwing up sand between me and the monster. With a grotesquely half-human attitude of alarmed surprise, the being dropped the gun and sprang back like a gigantic spider. The motion freed me from my paralysis of horror and I started backing cautiously around the bolder, afraid to run.

As I moved it sprang forward and a slender tube of white metal in one of the tentacled hands was suddenly pointed toward me. When the monster moved there was a humming

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sound and little jets of purple gas
hissed from holes in the sides of the
boxlike body.

I drew my automatic and fired at
the metal tube. I must have made
an unusually fortunate shot for the
object was carried out of the metal
grasp and fell spinning to the sand.
On the instant I turned and ran to-
ward another great boulder, as large
as a railroad locomotive, that lay
fifty yards to the north. As I ran
I heard the clatter and shirring of
the mechanical being. I paused at
the edge of the rock and took a last
glimpse back.

The monster was holding the little
tube in one of the limbs and ap-
parently adjusting it with another.
Then it suddenly extended the thing
toward me. I dived behind the rock.
A bright ray of orange light shot
past the boulder—a beam like that
which had come from the being in
the door of the rocketship. Then I
knew that here was an entity of the
same kind as the one I had de-
stroyed that night—one of the ruling
intelligences of the crater, the Krim-
lu.

For long moments I crouched
behind the boulder, expecting the
terrible being to come striding
around after me at any instant. But
it did not come, so presently I be-
gan to think. Perhaps the things
were not so powerful or so extremely
intelligent after all.

I had killed one, even if it had been
just by a chance shot in the dark.
This one had seemed surprised, even
alarmed, when the rifle went off
and I supposed that a being so in-
telligent as I had at first thought it
to be might have inferred the nature
and use of the weapon from its ap-
pearance.

And I thought that it must be
afraid of me after my pistol bullet
had knocked its own weapon out
of its grip or it would have followed
me around the boulder. Then I be-
gan to wonder what it was going to
do.

It evidently intended to strike me
with the ray weapon. Not only did it
respect me but it knew that I stood
in deathly fear of it. It knew that I

was trying to escape, so it might reasonably expect me to leave the unscalable cliff and attempt to break against the open country.

And if I were to do that I would naturally keep in the shelter of my own boulder as long as possible. If the monster thought it out that way the logical thing for it to do would be to creep out of the upper side of its rock, where I would inevitably come into its sight by whatever direction I left my breastwork.

Of course there was a frightful risk in taking any action on such a hypothesis—a greater risk than I realized at the time. If the monster were less intelligent than I supposed I might blunder on it. If it were more so it might have anticipated my plan—might trap me.

But I crawled out along the upper side of my boulder and peered over a smaller rock which would serve me as a breastwork, my automatic ready. I expected to see the creature within my range, intent upon my other lines of retreat. But it was not there. I thought I was doomed but the orange ray did not strike and I was forced to the conclusion that the monster was not in a position for action at all.

FOR a moment I was tempted to forward precipitate flight across the clearing but I knew that such a move would put me at the mercy of the ray. I decided that it might not yet be too late to carry out my original plan. I lay flat, my gun trained on the spot where I expected it to appear. For perhaps fifteen minutes nothing happened.

Then my hypothesis proved to be justified. The weird being suddenly sprang into view, the strange weapon grasped in its glittering arm. It seemed to be looking beyond my boulder. I was lying ready with the automatic leveled. It was a matter of the merest instant to aim at the green sphere and pull the trigger.

The globe was shattered as if it were made of glass. Glittering fragments showered off the metal box.

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cataclysm. The Krimlu were a surviving remnant of archaic ages.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN AUSTEN STRUCK

I LOST little time in the examination of the dead creature. The shafts from which it had come were but a few hundred yards below and the purple gas was still rolling out of the funnels. I did not know when a second monster might appear.

My mind was too much upset by grief and terror to be capable of intelligent planning but I knew I wanted to get away from here and I think I had some notion of reaching the northern pass, of getting back to an unburned growth of the red vegetation for I was weak with thirst and hunger. But all that was very vague.

I walked around the wells, keeping at a distance, and struck out for the east as fast as my wearied limbs could carry me. Soon the cliff was out of sight. All about was the desolate, rolling black landscape, with the gloomy purple sky overhead. My thoughts were as dark and sere as the world.

When I had gone perhaps three hours from the cliff and had almost lost my fear of pursuit I saw a great cigar-shaped object of gleaming white on a low hill before me. So dulled were my perceptions that it was many minutes before I realized that it was the rocketship in which we had come over the Silver Sea.

Then, with a faint thrill of hope, the thought came to me that it was still probably in a condition to fly and that, if I could succeed in controlling it, it offered a possible avenue of escape from the crater.

I walked up to the thick metal walls. They seemed undamaged by the fire. Of course, they were used to withstanding the far higher temperatures developed during flight. I walked around the ship and was

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of purple gas rushed out again. After a time I had the vessel worked loose from its place in the earth. Then, once again, I pulled up the little metal knob and pushed it forward.

The blackened terrain was colored by the purple mist. It was dimmed, blurred, blotted out. We shot through the purple cloud and plunged abruptly into clear air and blessed sunshine. Melvar stood by me, her arm upon my shoulder. She cried out gladly as we came into the light.

It was not quite noon and the Sun was shining brightly into the crater. The crescent Silver Lake was still gleaming with the same argent luster and Astran shone like a great gem set in the dark red upland beyond.

Suddenly the clouds of purple mist below were thrown up and scattered in a thousand ragged streamers. A great blaze of opalescence burst out where it had been. A flood of fire ran over the Silver Sea. It was a white milky light like that we had seen between the blue crystal globes to the great machine in the chasm.

In a moment the whole crater was a torn and angry ocean of iridescent flame. The red upland was blotted out and Astran vanished forever. White flames that were like the tongues of burning hydrogen that burst from exploding suns flared up behind us.

Then we heard the sound of the cataclysm—a crashing roar like the thunder of a thousand falling mountains, as deep, as vast, as awful as the crash of colliding worlds. At the same instant we felt the force of the greatest explosion that has ever occurred on earth.

The rocket shot upward as though shot out of a mighty cannon. The blue sky darkened about us and the stars flamed out like a million scintillating gems, their incredible myriads gleaming cold and hard against the infinite empty blackness. We had been hurled out of the atmosphere and into interplanetary space!

Austen had struck! The world of the Krimlu was no more! The whole Silver Sea had gone off in a great

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explosion. From our ever-rising craft we could see the desert spread out around the mountain like a vast yellow sea, rimmed on the south by a steely blue line that was the ocean.

The white fire dulled, faded and was gone as quickly as it had flared up. The crater of the Mountain of the Moon was left a wild black ruin of jagged scattered masses of smoking stone. Of the Silver Lake, of the red vegetation upon the upland, of brilliant Astran, not a trace was left!

The crater was left far behind in the long arching flight of the rocket. The white frozen brilliance of the stars faded out, the untold glories of the solar corona were dimmed and blue was restored to the midnight sky. We were plunging toward the desert in the direction of Kanowa. I pulled back the lever and used the full force of the rockets to check our meteor-like flight until the fuel was exhausted. A moment afterward we struck the earth.

We climbed out and left the vessel there on the sand. Just as the stars were coming out that night we arrived at the headquarters of a great sheep ranch. People were very much excited over the earthquake. The shock of the explosion of the Silver Lake, we learned had been registered at every seismographic station in the world.

The rancher and his wife cared for us with great hospitality, if ill-controlled curiosity. After we had had a week of rest they took us by automobile to Kanowna. There I astounded them by rewarding their generosity with a magnificent emerald—I still had in my pack a half pound or so of jewels that Naro had brought me from Astran.

Melvar ever surprised me with her innocent beauty, her grace and poise, with the ease with which she learned to face new situations and to meet people. I believe that no one ever suspected that she had not had a lifetime of training in the best of society. We were married at Kanowna and reached Perth a few days later.

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